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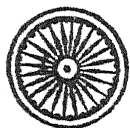
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by
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CHAPTER I

THE HOMELAND

The Indian homeland has been described countless times by *rishis* and poets, by historians, and by travellers from far-off places. They have sung of its mighty mountains its tall, dark forests, its tangled jungles where tigers and elephants roam, its majestic rivers, its fertile valleys and plains, its palm-fringed shores washed by the three oceans. *Bharat Mata*, symbol of the land we love, stands with feet delicately poised at the southern tip of the Peninsula, arms outstretched towards the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, head proudly lifted among the snowy Himalayas. She is the Motherland from whom her children draw their sustenance, and to whom they joyously give back their heart's warm devotion and love.

What sort of a land is this Motherland? As countries of the world go, India is a large country. It has an area of 1,269,640 square miles. From Kashmir to Cape Comorin it is 2,000 miles long, and nearly as wide from Kutch to Assam. But six countries are still larger, two in Asia, three in the New World, one in the Pacific Ocean. They are the Soviet Union (eight times larger than India), China, Canada, the United States, Brazil and Australia. But in population, India stands second only to China. China is believed to have some 500,000,000 inhabitants. India, according to the latest census, has a population of 360,000,000 million. From the standpoint of both land area and population, therefore, India is one of the really important countries of the world.

When India became free after centuries of political sub-

jugation on August 15, 1947, some seven years ago, by mutual agreement and consent among erstwhile brothers, the Indian family property was divided. Parts of old India were cut away to form another free and independent country, Pakistan.

Thus new frontiers suddenly came into existence. India's sea frontiers, shortened by 650 miles, now have a total length of 3,500 miles. The land frontiers have been extended to approximately 8,200 miles. The complex Indo-Pakistan frontier, of 2,600 miles, takes into account the two blocs of West Pakistan and East Pakistan, separated from each other by more than 700 miles of intervening Indian territory.

The new status of independence also required a reshaping of the country's political structure. British India was interlaced with a great number of semi-independent Indian States that were ruled by Princes under the advice of the paramount power. Left in that condition, India would have been hopelessly weak. With a wonderful spirit of co-operation, the Princes abdicated their autocratic power overnight in the interests of a strong and united India. Today, the Indian Union contains twenty-nine States, with Andhra as the youngest among them. Delhi continues to be the all-India capital.

Apart from the unfortunate rift with Pakistan, India maintains the friendliest of relations with all her other neighbours. The long border with Tibet, never clearly defined or mapped, stretches roughly 1,500 miles across difficult mountainous country. The line breaks towards the centre passing south of the crescent of Nepal and the two small semi-independent States of Sikkim and Bhutan, all of which have close relations with India. It then continues north of East Pakistan and Assam to Burma, which has a common frontier with Assam for several hundred miles.

Afghanistan and the USSR also just touch Kashmir in the far north-west, but while the status of Kashmir in spite of its accession to India remains a matter of dispute

between India and Pakistan and Pakistani forces are in actual physical occupation of northern Kashmir, these other countries of Asia have temporarily ceased to be India's neighbours.

So much for the outline of the Indian map. But we do not love a map. We love our mountains and rivers, our villages and towns, our wide, flat plains, the winding paths along which, morning and evening, the pearl-coloured village cows and the blue-black buffaloes pass, the cool shade of the mango groves in the hot season, the oncoming monsoon, refreshing the parched land and reviving the drooping spirits of man and beast, the yellowing rice-fields, with their promise of a full harvest.

Nature often parcels out her wealth as if she were limited to only one sort of building material. She either builds a land all mountains and rocky coast, or makes an arid desert out of blistering sands. She scatters her coral islets, like stepping-stones, fanning them with languid breezes. But to India she has given something of everything. All her treasures, in endless variety and unstinted measure, she has poured out to fashion this blessed land.

Bounded by mountains and seas, India was created by Nature a natural geographical unit. In the far north stretch the Himalayas, mightiest mountains of the world. Other lesser ranges, in the central and west-central parts of the country, are the Vindhya Mountains and the Aravalli, Satpura and Ajanta Hills. The Vindhya form a convenient dividing line between the Northern Plains and the Deccan Plateau. Down both sides of the Peninsula, but leaving coastal strips with numerous harbours and ports, run the Western and Eastern Ghats, or "Steps". In the South rise the Nilgiris. But the Himalayas are India's mountains of destiny.

This vast impregnable wall has a length of over 1,500 miles and is bastioned with hundreds of peaks more than twenty thousand feet high. It is true that difficult and hazardous passes penetrate it here and there, and that over these, in centuries past, the Indo-Aryans first came down

from the Steppes of Central Asia—or it may be the Anatolian Uplands—to settle in the plains of Northern India. Over the mountains, too, hardy traders carried their goods, and Buddhist missionaries their religion of love and peace. In later times, marauders often enough swept down through the passes to ravage the fertile Indian plains. Nevertheless, the Himalayas have always stood as a mighty rampart of protection, behind which, through slow centuries, India built up her distinctive culture and her own unique civilization.

To the Himalayas India also owes the salient features of her climate as well as her principal river-systems. The moisture-laden south-west monsoon, blowing regularly in from the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea towards the middle of June, moves northward over the Peninsula, depositing its life-giving rain. When it reaches the Himalayas, the massive barrier checks its further advance, thus conserving the major part of the rain for India. In three months, India thus receives nine-tenths of her annual rainfall. The Himalayan wall also saves India from the icy blasts which sweep down from the Arctic region and across Siberia and Central Asia during the winter months. Even the birds of Asia fly south at the approach of the cold weather to enjoy the more equable Indian climate.

More than any other country in the world, perhaps, is India favoured by the number and size of her rivers. Rivers served as the ancient highways of navigation and commerce, linking the great cities on their banks and the ports at their mouths from which Indian ships sailed bravely away to distant lands long before charts and instruments to sail by were known. And the rivers (together with lakes, storage tanks and wells), of course, have always sustained the agricultural population of India, which depends on them for its prosperity. Fortunately, each separate part of the country, except Rajasthan, has its own great river-system.

The Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, all rising in the Western Himalayas, are many hundreds of miles long, and all have innumerable branches and tributaries. The



*Kanchenjunga (28,146 ft.) in the Eastern Himalayas,
the third highest peak in the world*



Naga tribesmen from the hills of Assam

*Head of Buddha
Graeco-Buddhist School of Gandhara (circa 4th century A.D.)*





*Rock-cut Chaitya Hall, Cave No. XXVI
Ajanta, Hyderabad (7th century A.D.)*

Indus is pre-eminently the river of the North-west, the Ganga of the Northern Plains, and the Brahmaputra, after completing its long journey across Tibet, of Assam and East Pakistan. The Indus pours itself into the Arabian Sea, the other two empty into the Bay of Bengal. Though the Ganga and her twin sister Yamuna are looked upon as holy rivers, it was the Indus that was first associated with Indian history.

The five tributaries or affluents of the Indus—Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—are the five rivers which gave the "land of the five rivers" its name of Punjab. To the Indus, India owes her name. The Vedic Aryans called the great river of the North-west *Sindhu*. Their neighbouring Iranian cousins changed this to *Hindu*, while the "country-of-the-river" became *Hindustan*. For *Hindu*, the Greeks next substituted *Indos*, which the Romans in their turn modified to *Indus*. *Indus* has finally remained as the name of the river, while the whole country has become *India*.

The Deccan and South India also have their great rivers. Narbada and Tapti, rising respectively in the Vindhya and the Aravalli Hills, flow westward across the Deccan into the Gulf of Cambay. The Mahanadi, Godavari and Krishna flow east into the Bay of Bengal. Still farther south flow the Pennar and the Kaveri.

India's unlimited water resources, if properly developed, are easily capable of supplying all the irrigation needs of the country, as well as power for industrial development. But soil erosion and the devastating annual floods resulting from the progressive deforestation of the mountain slopes have first to be controlled. This is why New India is feverishly engaged in building a score or more of giant multi-purpose river projects—to control the erosion and the floods, to give perennial irrigation to millions of acres of land, to provide cheap navigation, and to generate hydro-electric power on a vast scale.

Yet it is interesting to know that ancient Indian rulers also understood the need of harnessing rivers, constructing dams and embankments and digging canals. A pre-Sanskrit inscription from Orissa, the ancient Kalinga, probably

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belonging to the second century B.C., describes the virtues of King Kharavela, who is praised for having "renovated and extended certain old canals". The earliest known Sanskrit inscription of India, of a period equivalent to 150 A.D., also relates, strangely enough, to irrigation. This inscription is at Girnar in Saurashtra, and refers to a reservoir originally excavated in the fourth century B.C. by a provincial governor of Chandragupta, the first emperor of the Maurya dynasty. A second inscription states that this reservoir was later enlarged, and was kept in repair for eight hundred years.

Though rivers form a natural means of easy communication and integration between different parts of the country, roads are no less important. Ancient India was criss-crossed by several great trunk roads. One, which connected in the far north-west with caravan routes to Central Asia, Iran and China, proceeded from Kabul by way of Peshawar, Taxila, Sakala (Sialkot), Kanauj, Prayag (Allahabad) and Kasi (Banaras) to Pataliputra (Patna), the capital of the great Mauryan Empire. From here it continued on to Tamluk, the ancient seaport of Bengal. A second main road started from Kapilavastu near the Nepal border, where the Buddha was born in the sixth century B.C., and passed on to Ayodhya (the city of Rama), Kausambi and Vidisa (Besnagar, near Bhilsa) in Central India; it then proceeded to Ujjain, where it turned south and after crossing the Deccan ended at Madura, the capital of the ancient Pandyan kingdom. Still another road started from Bengal and connected with the western seaports.

Chandragupta's famous minister, Kautilya, says that the Mauryan Royal Road was 64 feet wide and was lined with shady trees and provided with rest-houses and wells for the comfort of travellers. Towns and villages through which it passed had to maintain it in good condition, and fines were imposed on anyone caught damaging the road or causing obstruction to traffic. Chandragupta's grandson, the great Asoka, as we know from his stone edicts, bestowed

equal attention upon the roads of the Empire in the third century B.C.

Road building in India is receiving renewed attention today, and the vast schemes being carried out all over the country include not only national highways and State and district roads, but, for the first time, village-level roads as well. Eighty-three per cent of the Indian people live in 550,000 small villages. Hitherto, the villages were deprived of most of the amenities of modern life, and have had very limited economic outlets for their produce. The new roads will integrate the villages with cities and materially raise the standard of living in rural areas. No wonder the villagers are coming forward in their thousands to give their labour voluntarily for the construction of the new roads.

The country is also integrated by its modern railways, telegraph system, radio and air-planes. The earliest railway in India, from Bombay to Poona, was laid down just a century ago, exactly twenty-eight years after Great Britain had built the first railway in the world. India's nationalized railway system, already covering 35,000 miles, is being further expanded. All the principal towns and cities are now connected by regular day and night air services operated by the nationalized Indian air lines.

Thus, apart from Nature's gift of a basic geographical unity, man-made channels of communication have also helped in unifying the Indian homeland.

CHAPTER II

WE THE PEOPLE

We, the people of the Indian homeland, stand for the sum of all that our ancestors living here through ages past have thought and done. We are also, in part, the product of influences and pressures exerted from outside. Many and varied, therefore, are the strands out of which the fabric of our national life has been woven.

Other nations have a history as long as India's, perhaps, but where is the continuity between past and present? Do the Egyptians of today in any way resemble their ancestors who built the Great Pyramids? The Chinese in their hurry, or so it seems, to learn the modern language of material advancement, are now in the process of repudiating what once made their civilization illustrious in the eyes of the world. Where are Sumer and Chaldea and Babylon, old contemporaries of India? Where are the glories even of the younger Greece and Rome? We gaze curiously at fragments of their broken vases, and other remnants of their dead civilizations, neatly ticketed in museums.

But with a strange vitality, India lives. After each devastating wave of conquest, the people have somehow risen again, their inner life miraculously intact. Does this mean that changes have never come through the centuries, or that Indian life is fossilized, like the shells found high up on the Himalayas, carried there millions of years ago when a vast continental pressure first squeezed the primeval ooze of the ocean-bed into the folds of gigantic mountains? On the contrary, the secret of Indian vitality lies in its

wonderful capacity to tolerate different views, different customs, different levels of understanding. If "nothing in excess" was the motto of ancient Greece, "variety in unity" or "unity in variety" has always been the motto of India.

So here we are, the people of India, born of the many vicissitudes of a long history, each of the many strands adding its own special note of colour, or a sudden flash of gold, to the intricate pattern of the national life. Even before recorded history began, dimly understood migrations of human beings had begun to pour their streams into India. The process has gone on even up to quite modern times, though with an ever diminishing force. Out of this background emerges our multi-coloured population, with its race mixtures, its various languages, and its groups at all stages of social evolution—yet all knowing no other home than India. "We the people" includes them all.

Side by side with the rest of us are no fewer than 10,000,000 members of the so-called primitive tribes. Most of them live in a broad belt of Central India stretching across Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Bengal. Others are found in Assam, or in the remoter Himalayas, and still others in odd pockets scattered through the Deccan and South India, and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of the Bay of Bengal.

Few of the tribal people have any written language. Their dialects are Austric, Kolarian, Munda or Tibeto-Burman in origin, or represent adaptations of Aryan or Dravidian languages spoken by the people who now live on either side of them. The strength of their tribal organizations is what has permitted them to survive in a totally different kind of world. The men are warriors in the all but forgotten sense of the word, depending on their own personal skill and bravery to defend themselves against the tigers and other wild beasts who haunt their forest clearings. They practise a make-shift agriculture. Their wants are few, and they have a wholesome scorn for the clap-trap of modern civilization. Their lives are not out of balance with the forces of nature surrounding them.

They are hardy, simple, truthful, child-like. The Naga warriors of Assam, when invited to take part in the National Independence Festival at Delhi, win the highest applause from the on-lookers. Their vivid dancing brings to life memories of the remote past of all mankind.

Searching for ancient roots, we also remember Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Valley civilization of five thousand years ago. Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, the two best known sites of the ancient city civilization of north-west India, have now passed to Pakistan, but Rupar lies in the Simla Hills, and other associated sites have been discovered as far west as Saurashtra and possibly as far south as Rajasthan.

The ancient cities reveal the earliest municipal planning known to the world. The streets were straight, crossing each other at rigid right angles. The houses were of burnt brick, many of them provided with private bath-rooms, which were connected, by means of chutes inset in the walls, with the municipal drainage system. There were large public bathing-tanks, or pools. The people were evidently prosperous traders and agriculturists, though their utensils were still of stone, copper or bronze. They could read and write, as we know from the numerous carved seals which have been found at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. These seals bear a pictographic script and finely carved representations of animals, such as tigers, elephants, buffaloes and the typical Indian humped bull. One of the seals shows a Siva*-like deity sitting cross-legged in the familiar Indian posture of meditation. (The pair of horns he wears might easily have been transformed at some later period into a crescent moon.) The Indus people also worshipped animals and snakes, tree-spirits, and above all a Mother Goddess.

The origin, race, language and script of the Indus city-builders are still wrapped in mystery, but the people are known to have had some kind of relationship with Sumer,

* The international phonetic spelling has been adopted, but without diacritical marks, in the use of such words as Shiva, Shaivite, Shyama, Vaishya, etc., hence Siva, Saivite, Syama and Vaisya.

in Mesopotamia. At the same time, the resemblances between their civilization and the ancient Dravidian civilization of South India are sufficiently marked for scholars to have tentatively bestowed the name Proto-Dravidian on the Indus people. It is indeed impossible to believe that the mysterious city-builders of the North-west never had any connection with the rest of India, and left no trace behind, when they disappeared from view about the middle of the second millennium B.C. However, recent researches in pre-history are beginning to indicate that such is not the case.

Indians today are chiefly a blend of two major racial strains. The separation of races has long ceased, but that it once existed is evident from the fact that Dravidian languages are spoken by at least a quarter of the Indian people today, and Aryan languages by practically all the rest. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu, Dravidian in origin, are the languages of South India and the Deccan. The languages of North India and Maharashtra—Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, Bengali and Assamese—on the other hand, are all Aryan. So is Sanskrit, of course. How the two races met and fused, producing a living and unified culture, is the story of India itself.

It used to be taken for granted that the Dravidians had not only always been in India, but had once spread over the whole country. Then the conquering Aryans are supposed to have come and pushed them into the South. A different view has come to be held since the connection between the Indian Dravidians and the great family of Mediterranean peoples has been brought to light.

Long before iron was known in North India, the Dravidians of South India were making and using iron weapons and tools. This knowledge of iron distinguishes their culture from the Stone Age culture which preceded it. The Dravidians also built Megalithic tombs, in the form of stone circles, menhirs and dolmens (all containing objects of iron) which have been found scattered in enormous numbers over the Deccan and the South. From

this stage, the Dravidians swiftly evolved into a highly civilized people.

That the very early Dravidian people shared their knowledge of iron, at least with the people then living in the Sinai Peninsula at the head of the Red Sea, has been amply proved by recent excavations in that area, which have uncovered what are believed to be the oldest iron mines so far known in the world. Megalithic remains strikingly similar to and probably considerably older than those of India are also abundant in the Mediterranean region. These are totally missing in North India, except for a few traces near Karachi. Iron remained unknown in North India until long after it had come into common use in the South. These are the findings which seem to indicate that the typical early Dravidian culture probably never flourished north of the Vindhyas at all, but had a definite link with Mediterranean countries, and from there spread to the coastal areas in between.

Did the Dravidians then enter India from outside? No final answer can be given. All that can be said is that the similarities between the Mohenjo-daro culture, the ancient culture of Crete, and the early Dravidian culture of South India seem to be links in a chain. Still another link is the otherwise inexplicable presence in Baluchistan of a tribe known as the Brahuis who speak a Dravidian dialect to this day, though they are separated from the Dravidians of South India by more than a thousand miles, bear no racial resemblance to them, and have had no known contact with them in historical times.

The most important event in Indian cultural history, however, is certainly the Aryan advance into North India, perhaps 4000 years ago. About the same time when the nomad Aryan herdsmen in search of grazing-lands were coming down into India in successive waves, other Aryan tribes were fanning out with explosive energy from the same mysterious centre in Asia towards Iran and Europe. This is the picture reconstructed from our knowledge of the fact that the North Indian, Iranian, Russian and European

languages of today all belong to the same Indo-European family group, having a basically similar syntax and related vocabularies. But the archaic Sanskrit of the ancient Indic Aryans (miraculously preserved in the Vedas) is the oldest surviving Aryan language.

The hymns of the Rigveda reveal the religious and deeply speculative ideas of the Indic Aryans, and also a great deal about themselves, their appearance, and their activities. Mainly a pastoral people, accompanied by their honoured tribal priests, they moved on across a hostile frontier land. Some of the hymns name rivers, identifiable with the present-day rivers of eastern Afghanistan. Fierce conflicts occurred between the invaders and the people already in possession of the land, and the setting of the earliest conflicts is clearly North-west India, particularly the Punjab. Who the dispossessed original inhabitants were we do not know, but they may have been tribes not unlike those still living in Central India and the Himalayas. The Aryans called them *Dasas*, or *Dasyus* (slaves), or by tribal names, and contemptuously described them as black-skinned, noseless, malignant, and non-sacrificing, in contrast to themselves, who were tall and fair, with prominent noses! The *Dasyus* nevertheless had a hundred walled forts, broad and wide, made of stone, and strong as metal. Indra, the chief of the Aryan gods, became the mighty "destroyer of forts". Was it Indra, then, who was responsible for destroying the last of the Indus cities?

The victorious Aryans continued to advance, sometimes making alliances of friendship with the defeated chieftains of enemy tribes. Aryan settlements, at first isolated, gradually grew into compact areas. Great Aryan kingdoms arose, described in detail in the Puranic and Epic literature. From Aryavarta, the country between the upper Yamuna and Ganga, these kingdoms spread eastwards to Bihar and southwards to the Vindhya. And at last the Aryans ruled the whole of North India.

The peaceful penetration of South India was already simultaneously progressing. The Aryan conquest of the

Dravidian South was essentially a spiritual and intellectual conquest. Aryan *rishis* and teachers carried with them not only the Vedic wisdom and the Sanskrit language in which it was enshrined, the knowledge of the Aryan gods and the sacred rituals of their worship, but that poetic, imaginative and questing spirit which the first sight of the snow-clad Himalayas and the rushing rivers of the Indian Northland had awakened in their ancestors long, long ago. The Dravidians accepted what the Aryans brought and an inexorable mingling of the two civilizations began. Dravidian gods and goddesses, Dravidian ideas and customs, also passed into the Aryan stream. Every Hindu Indian of today, whether he is aware of it or not, is a product of this exchange and ultimate fusion of cultures.

In the great amalgam of Indian peoples accommodation had also to be made for later invaders. In the thousand-year period between 500 B.C. and 500 A.D., Persians, Greeks, Sakas, Kushans and Huns all succeeded in forcing their way into India by precisely the same route over which the ancient Aryans had travelled. They overran the North-west, and either detached it from the rest of India by temporarily adding it to some empire of their own, as Darius did when he made it the twentieth satrapy of the Persian Empire, or they set themselves up as local rulers in the Punjab, like the Asiatic Greeks of Bactria, and the Pahlavas and Sakas, or like the Kushans, they made Gandhara the focal point for a great new northern empire—half Indian, half Central Asian—or else, descending upon India as wanton looters, like the Huns, they departed, satiated, of their own accord. All such invasions were of a temporary nature, and their force was invariably spent in one, two, or three centuries at most. In the end, practically all of these foreigners had become so thoroughly Indianized, through intermarriages and the adoption of Indian manners, languages and customs, that they had ceased to be foreigners. This was a tribute to the innate strength of Indian culture, as expressed in its basic ideas and institutions, but it was also a proof of the strangely flexible character of the Indian mind. India might

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not resist political conquest, but she soon made the conquerors her own by accepting them into her fold.

From each, even the Huns, she gathered some new element of strength. The orderly administration of the twentieth satrapy was observed, and later served as a model for the Mauryan Empire founded by Chandragupta. The Greeks left behind them a beautifully minted standard coinage, which facilitated the prosperous international trade of the Kushan era. The Kushans, who had already been exposed to a higher civilization during a sojourn of a century in Bactria before they moved into India in the second century B.C., contributed a new form of art, Gandharan art. It was a forceful medium, suitable to the time and place, for translating and propagating, even to far-away China, the message of Buddhism they had received from India, and which had so miraculously tamed their own restless Asiatic souls. Roving tribes of Sakas and Huns, barbarous but virile, pushed still deeper into India. Many of their chieftains took daughters of defeated Indian kings in marriage. From among their vigorous offspring, initiated into Hinduism by sacred fire-rites performed near Mount Abu, powerful Rajput clans later arose.

During the early centuries, too, India received and absorbed a few foreigners who came not through lust of power and greed, but as religious refugees, or simple traders. A little band of Syrian Christians, escaping from Roman persecution, arrived in Travancore in the first century A.D. They were hospitably welcomed, allowed to settle down and follow their religion in peace, and they became the nucleus of the first Indian Christian community. Jewish refugees arrived, and became Indian Jews. Zoroastrians from southern Persia, fleeing before the Arab whirlwind, landed on the west coast of India, somewhere north of the present Bombay, more than a thousand years ago. Their descendants are the advanced and able Parsi community of the present time.

Two other principal waves of invaders have also

influenced India, and far more profoundly than any of the casual visitors of earlier times.

Between the thirteenth century and the early part of the sixteenth, rival Muslim conquerors from Afghanistan and Central Asia, all heading for Delhi, followed close on one another's heels. Delhi became the Muslim capital of India for the next seven hundred years. As a result, India now has forty million Muslim citizens, the third largest Muslim population of any country in the world, next only to Indonesia and Pakistan. All but a fraction of them are Indian by birth and descent, though Muslim by faith. They did not join Pakistan, but have remained in India, keeping their rightful place among other integral groups of the population. India, which has never accepted the so-called two-nation theory—the basis for the creation of Pakistan—welcomes her Muslim nationals and will not betray their trust.

As the great empire of the Mughals sickened and fell apart, the Europeans inopportunely arrived upon the scene, and out of their jealousies and petty wars British India next emerged. This happened only yesterday, and already the desultory residue of this last conquest of India, before freedom was finally won, is being swept aside. The British, too, though they never made India their home, have left behind an Anglo-Indian community. Though not very large in numbers, this group has nevertheless come to occupy a useful place in the national life of the country.

Both Muslims and British added new languages and scripts to the many already in use in India—Urdu and Persian, and the Persian script, and English, together with the Roman script. India's rich cultural inheritance from medieval Iran was a gift from her Mughal rulers. To the British India owes the English language, hitherto the chief means of communication among Indians otherwise cut off from one another by regional language barriers. It has also been the means of contact between India and all the other countries of Asia and the West. Hindi has now become the national language, but English has opened the door for India into the larger international world.

CHAPTER III

ROOTS OF INDIAN CULTURE

The composers of the Vedic hymns, *rishis* and seers as they were, were vigorous spokesmen of a freedom-loving community. They were also Nature-poets of a high order. The varied aspects and moods of the world around them filled them with awe and delight.

They watched the delicate beauty of the unveiling Dawn, hailed with joy the rising Sun, trembled before the fierce onslaught of the Storm who wore the lightning for an ornament. They gave thanks to beneficent Rain which caused grass to sprout for their herds and barley and corn for themselves. In Wind, Sky and Ocean, they caught a vision of infinite space. The waxing and waning Moon, relentless marker of time, measured the rise and flow of sap in the plants and their own life's span. Stars were the abode of many who had gone on before. To the immovable Mountain, with matted locks of snow, plunged in silent meditation, they lifted adoring hearts. Rivers seemed to them majestic goddesses. Fire, presiding over the Aryan hearth and altar, was their radiant friend.

These early Aryan divinities, the bright Devas, were given names and worshipped—not in the form of images in temples, but with hymns of praise and sacrificial offerings. They were described as riding the sky in chariots or descending to mingle in the affairs of men, and to help their devotees. Indra, king of the gods and leader of Aryan battles, was the only one who wore the lineaments of a more or less human god. The others were strangely form-

less, trailing a vague mystery about them. Each in turn was addressed as all-supreme, but some final conviction seemed to be lacking on the part of the hymn-singers. The enquiring Aryan mind was searching for something more ultimate, something behind and beyond the whole of the manifested universe.

In the tenth and last book of the Rigveda appear the wonderful philosophic hymns which ask and answer profound questions posed by the early Aryans. What was there before this world, this sky, and this earth became visible, when there was yet no distinction between night and day, when neither death nor deathlessness were known? There was the Golden Germ, source of all life. There was *Purush*, the Universal Being, with infinite heads, unnumbered eyes and unnumbered feet. There was that One, neither male nor female, the eternal, impersonal principle inseparably united with its own power of manifestation. Other than it, nothing was. And there came the ultimate affirmation: "That which exists is One, the sages call it by many names."

Having reached this point, it might seem impossible for thought to go any further, but the practical problem of man's relation to the One had yet to be resolved. In the post-Rigvedic period, aglow with the wisdom of the Upanishads, the teacher proclaimed to his disciples in the forest schools, *Tat Tvam Asi*, 'That Thou Art'. Man, in his essence, cannot be different from the One. He is not merely an infinitesimal part of a part-less Infinite. He himself is the Infinite. Body and form are only his outer garments, worn and cast aside. The realization of this truth means immortality. Again the Upanishads thundered forth: "Not by wealth, not by progeny, but by renunciation alone is immortality to be reached."

The future direction of Indian religions and philosophies, and the characteristic social and cultural patterns of the India-to-be, were now foreshadowed.

The idea of spiritual unity had been grasped, but everywhere in the world man was confronted with endless

variety. How could the obviously differing tendencies and capacities of human beings lead to an ultimate, identical goal? The Indian mind demanded an explanation, and found it in the fundamental doctrine of Rebirth, linked to the concept of *Karma*. One life is too short a time for all to achieve supreme spiritual knowledge. So men must be born again and again, progressing through many lives, from lower to higher forms. They experience the fruits of their past actions, both good and bad, and continue to create fresh *Karma* for themselves by new actions until at last the veil of ignorance drops, and they become aware of their divine nature. Thereafter they are freed from further rounds of birth and death.

These ideas of Rebirth and *Karma* were easily accepted in ancient India. Nearly all primitive peoples take as axiomatic the soul's migration into other bodies and forms, but the evil potentiality of a fate over which they have no control fills them with dread. The Indian doctrine of *Karma* gave a new ethical basis to the primitive belief in transmigration. It made no discrimination between people of different levels, but applied equally to all. It taught men to strive after good, rather than evil, and it gave them a spirit of tolerance. Each of us is at the appointed rung of the ladder to which our combined good and bad deeds have permitted us to climb—and all are on the way up.

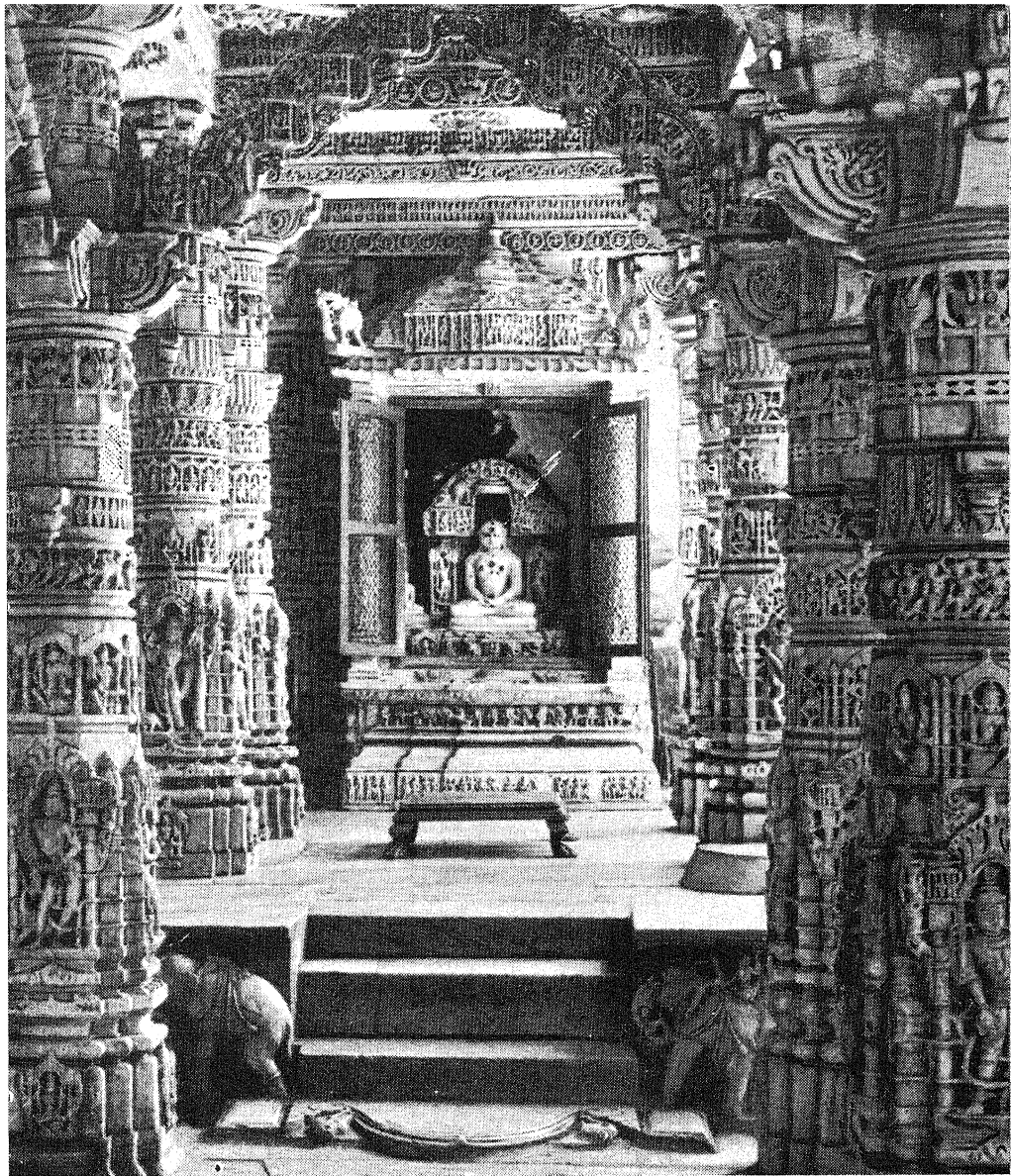
In the sixth century B.C., Buddhism and Jainism added a new emphasis to the Upanishad teachings. Not only men, but animals, and the minutest things that flutter, move or breathe, are alike expressions of one life-force. The Karmic "seeds" are there, too, and each has the right to live out its own life. A sudden new tenderness entered into the relationship between human beings and the animal world, and the doctrine of *Ahimsa*, or non-injury, became part of the spiritual heritage of India. In his sermons, the Buddha recounted many stories of his previous lives in the form of animals or birds, as well as lowly human beings. In each, the *Bodhisattva* ideals of unselfishness, charity and

love found expression through some act of noble sacrifice for the sake of another. Among the Jain followers of Mahavira, the Buddha's great contemporary, the practice of the vow of non-injury toward all living creatures became an integral part of the discipline. A Jain would not walk at night, lest he inadvertently crush life out of a worm.

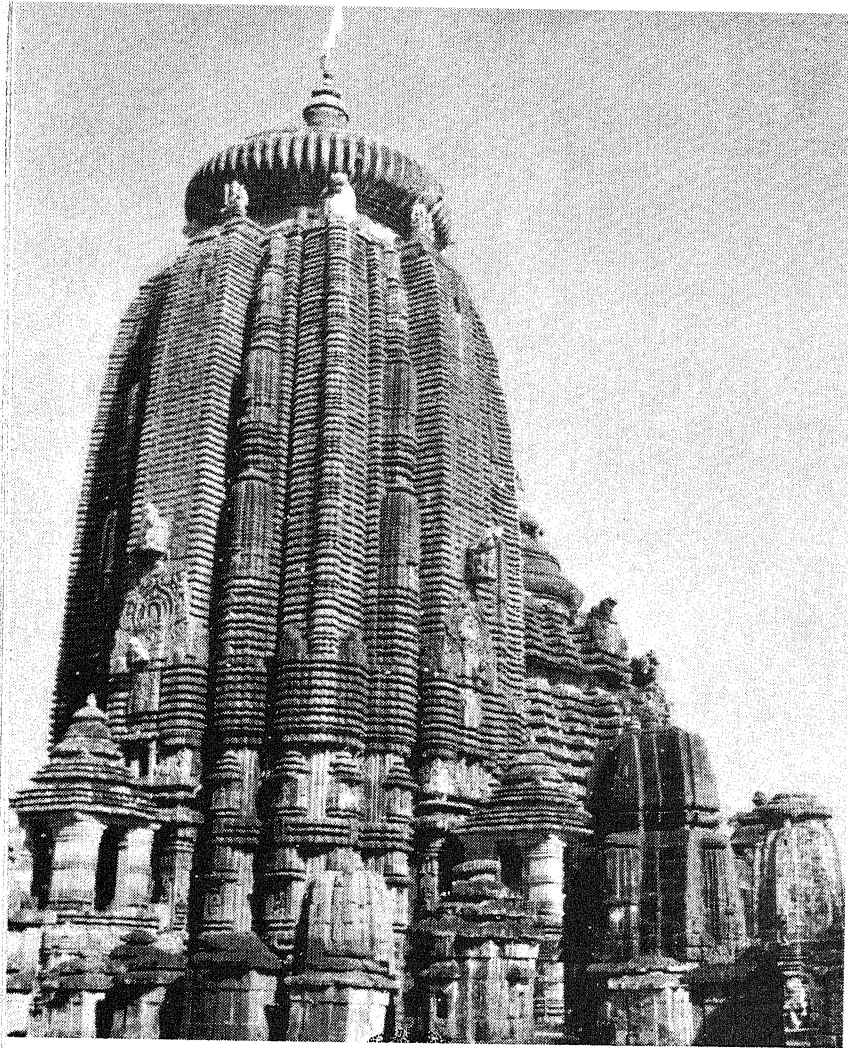
Another powerful conception of early Indian thought was that of ever-recurring Cycles of Time. With life moving in an endless stream, and the perspective that of an infinitely unwinding scroll, no element of vulgar haste attended the primal scheme of things as envisioned by early Indian thinkers. The worlds themselves are swinging in vast unmeasurable cycles. There is an apparent beginning and end, but it is only apparent. From the finer unmanifested state, the present universe—only one of an infinite series—has become manifest and will again return to an unmanifested state. Creation is but the name of the first phase, growth of the middle phase, dissolution of the last phase, of the eternal process. Aeons succeed aeons. Universes take birth and dissolve, and take form again, through all eternity. To effect this tremendous play, the formless *Brahman* is conceived as putting forth his power under the three-fold aspect of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Upholder and Sustainer, and Siva the Destroyer—chief gods of later Hinduism.

Such were some of the fundamental ideas and thoughts which took root in ancient India and profoundly influenced the life of the people, reflecting themselves in Indian social, economic and cultural institutions.

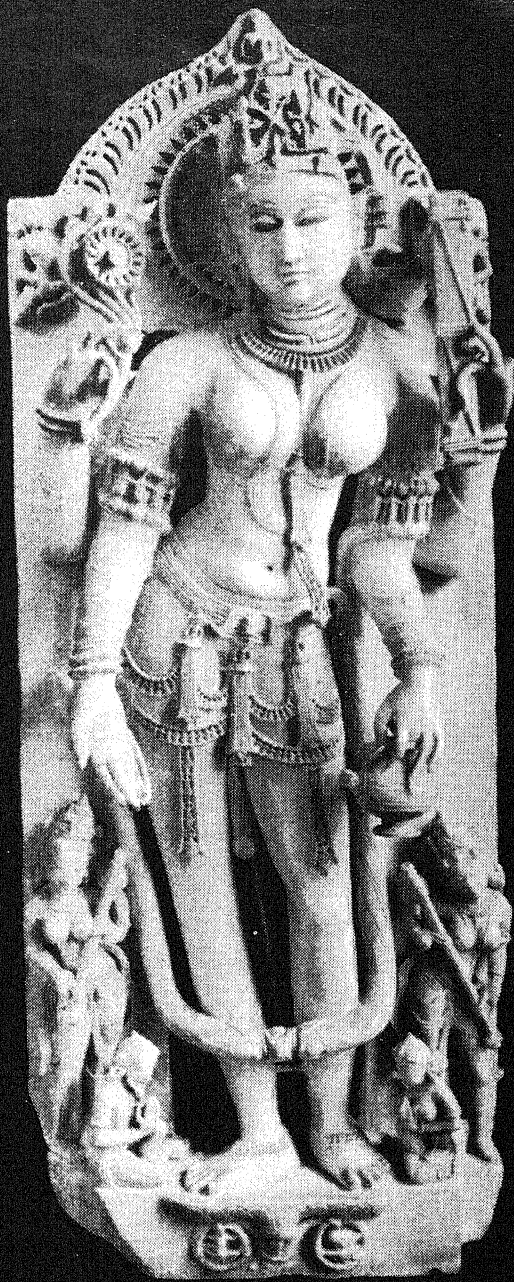
In the original society of Aryan freemen, the priests, the herdsmen and cultivators, and the warriors were indifferently drawn from one and the same community, and men followed one occupation or another to suit the particular need of the moment. The head of the patriarchal family made the offerings and chanted the appropriate hymns before the family altar. When the period of wandering and camp-life was over and the Indian Aryans settled down in their new homeland, a division of



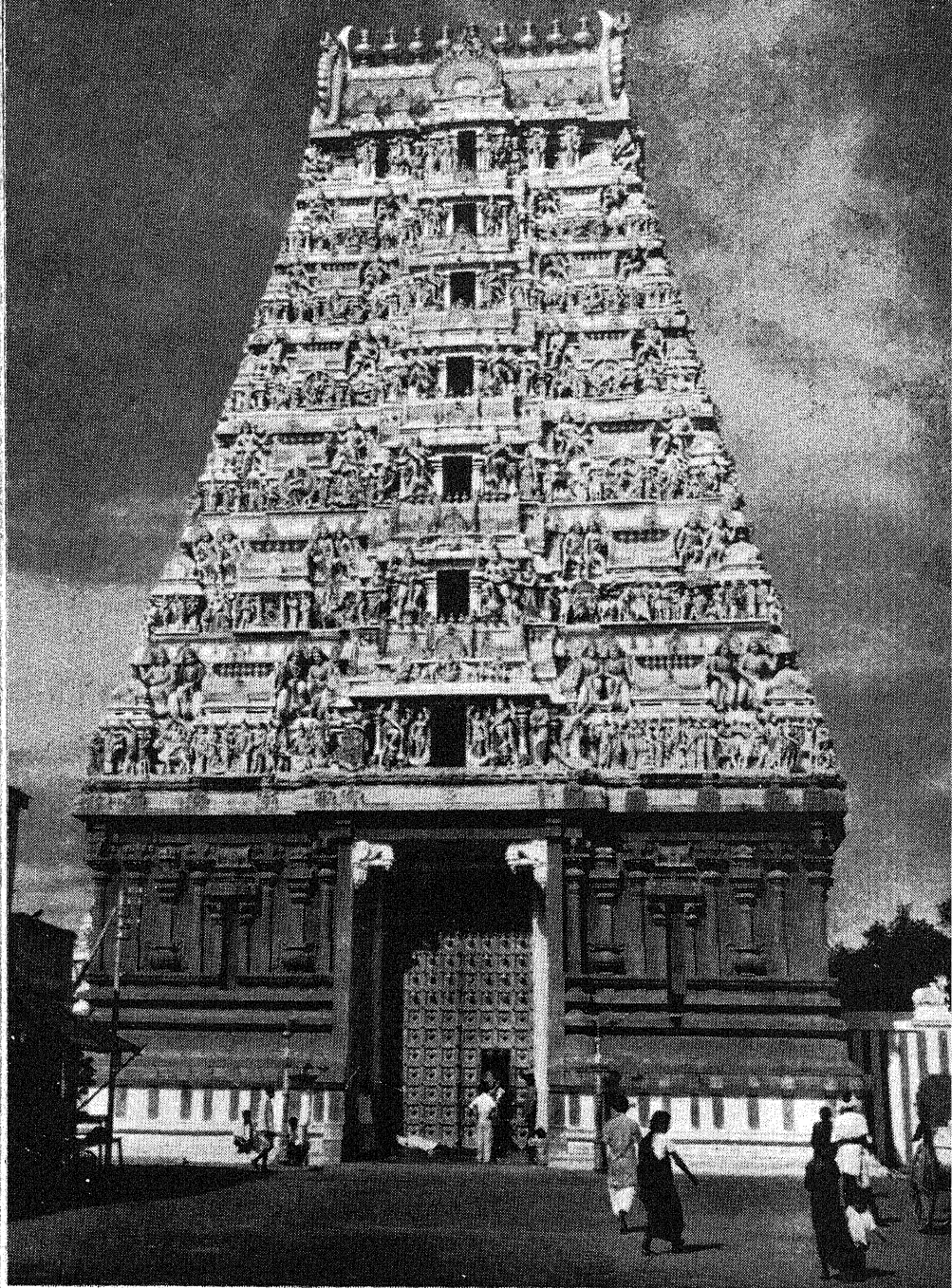
*Jain temple in white marble
Dilwara, Mount Abu (11th century A.D.)*



*Lingaraja Temple
Bhubaneswar (11th century A.D.)*



*Saraswati, Goddess of Learning
Marble figure from Bikaner (12th century A.D.)*



*Gopuram (gate-tower) at Varadaraja Temple
Kanchi (circa 12th century A.D.)*

functions came into existence. The new divisions were not absolutely fixed and rigid, and for a long time there was some exchange between the groups, but gradually the Hindu caste system, as we now know it, became crystallized.

Three classes were first formed—Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. The first consisted of priests, teachers and law-makers, the second of warriors (from among whom the king was chosen) and the third of herdsmen, cultivators and traders. Below these, a fourth class of Sudras presently emerged. It consisted of large numbers of the original inhabitants who had become Aryanized and had been absorbed into the society on a somewhat inferior footing. Still others remained untouched by Aryan influence. They continued to live apart, in forest or jungle, following their own primitive customs. Eventually, some began to creep up to the fringes of the larger communities, and humbly took upon themselves the most menial and filthy of the community tasks. Though their services were accepted, they were despised for the work they did and were treated as untouchables. The depressed and backward classes of Indian society today, who are perhaps their lineal descendants, still suffer the stigma of prejudice of an earlier age in which ritual purity was scrupulously cherished.

In early Dravidian society, the divisions were based on regional rather than functional classification. People were grouped according to the type of geographical area they came from—mountain, forest, plain or sea-coast. Such regional divisions played a dominant part in determining the work of the people, and in South India, too, functional occupations gradually tended to become hereditary. Like their forefathers before them, for example, the folk of the sea-coast followed specialized occupations as fishermen, pearl-fishers, makers of boats or of nets, salt-makers, or traders in salt, shell or pearls. Upon this economic sub-structure, the Aryan caste system gradually took hold, thus spreading over the whole of India. Yet in the South, while Brahmins occupied the highest rank in the social scale as they did in the North, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were

practically non-existent. Sudras took the place of the latter, but since they constituted the bulk of the population their status was not inferior. Strangely enough, however, in South India the untouchables were condemned to the worst form of social oppression that has ever been known in India.

The distinctive feature of the caste system was that men were not only expected to follow a given functional occupation, but were considered born to it as a result of their past *Karma*. They married within the particular caste, and could never escape from it as long as they remained in Hindu society.

Like all schemes of social and economic organization, the caste system had both defects and virtues. It produced a remarkably integrated economy in which chaotic competition was eliminated and ordered co-operation among different groups became natural. Every man had a given work to do, and he could not feel alone in doing it. Techniques and knowledge, handed down from family to family, made him familiar from childhood with every aspect of his special caste work, and he developed a high degree of skill and a natural aptitude for it. This gave him self-confidence and self-respect. Within the caste, he was the equal of every other member, and the caste gave him a feeling of solidarity with the group. Each caste made its own rules and governed itself through the caste panchayat. Not even a Brahmin could dictate what customs, in regard to food, marriage and so forth, any other caste should follow. Very largely as a result of the caste system, alien conquests of later centuries were confined to the political field, and Indian society was saved from a complete break-up within. One may well wonder whether India could ever have survived a thousand years of disintegrating foreign rule and emerged once again as the great nation of today without some such hard core as the caste system.

Another typical and enduring institution was that of the Indian village. What would India be without its villages? The charm, the stability, the simplicity, the vitality of India

itself is still wrapped up in her village life. In spite of its present poverty, the village lives, because it has remained an organic whole. The idea of a common good bound together all the different groups within the village.

Everyone was given his chance to earn a living by contributing to the essential needs of the village. There was no unemployment. Carpenters, iron-smiths, washermen, barbers and potters were paid in village grain, on the basis of a proportionate share handed over at harvest time by each cultivating family. Weavers, dyers, metal-workers and others exchanged their wares for the grain they needed. The village accountant, the watchman, the Brahmin school teacher and the Brahmin priest, who performed all the household ceremonies enjoined by the scriptures, were also an integral part of the village unit, receiving their support from it in return for their services. A panchayat, chosen by the people from among themselves, ran the over-all affairs of the village and saw to the enforcement of the customary laws. The village was thus both self-contained and basically democratic. The collection of taxes, in kind, by the king's officers was almost its only link with the outside world.

Between city and city, trade guilds strengthened the economic solidarity of the castes and widened their contacts. Through the demand for luxuries in the cities, higher standards of craft workmanship were fostered. Village craftsmen could always find their way to a city and obtain a better return for their labours than mere livelihood, if they could show the artist's true mastery.

Whether men lived in society or left it, the spiritual emphasis in Indian life was never lost sight of, and a way always lay open for every individual, whatever his status, caste, limitation or inclination, to advance towards a spiritual ideal. For the heroic few, the path was that of renunciation and knowledge. For the many, it was the faithful fulfilment of Dharma, as laid down in the scriptures, and devotion to God, according to one's best understanding.

However, even ordinary men were given an opportunity

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to follow the heroic few, if they so chose, to the mountain cave or forest Asrama, in the latter part of their lives. Social custom sanctioned the division of life into two parts—one, active and practical, the other, meditative and spiritual. In the first period, the student left home, observed strict self-control, or Brahmacharya, and mastered the sacred literature under a qualified teacher. He then married, had children and fulfilled all his worldly duties to his family and society. In the second period of his life, he was freely permitted to retire to the forest and devote himself exclusively to the spiritual quest. If he succeeded in reaching the goal of self-knowledge, he became a Sannyasi, freed from all bonds.

In the Buddhistic period, those who felt an urge to leave the world of *maya* flocked to the monasteries to become monks. Women also cut their hair and put on the robes of renunciation. By refusing to recognize the privileged position of the Brahmin priest, Buddhism indirectly undermined caste. The monasteries were thrown open to all, and in the Middle Way of the Buddha severe austerities were discouraged. The rules of the Sangha, or Brotherhood, were truthfulness, simplicity, courtesy, harmlessness, service, and "diligent striving", and the means to enlightenment were right thoughts, words and conduct.

The other way—the way of Dharma and devotion to the Lord, as taught in the Gita—was simpler and easier to follow, and it naturally became the way for most. It required no supreme act of renunciation and withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, the world was accepted as real, and each individual had a definite place in it and definite duties to perform, which varied according to time and circumstances. A child owed its parents loving obedience. The chaste wife owed her selfless devotion to her husband and family. The husband owed support and protection to his wife and children, and hospitality to whomsoever might seek it. Caste work was to be properly performed. A Brahmin was to acquire knowledge and impart it to his disciples, and he was not to accumulate

riches. A king was expected to rule justly, protect the people, and promote their prosperity. The warrior was to fight bravely, but always with chivalry. The goldsmith was to give his client the full value of the gold ordered. Dharma required a man to live in society as a civilized human being, checking his selfish urges in the interests of others. If he could do this, and have faith in and love for the Lord, he, too, would reach the goal.

The stability of Indian life, for centuries past, has rested on the firm foundation of Dharma. So has the integrated Hindu family. Through the inculcation of the spirit of Dharma, high standards of ethics, clear-cut codes of behaviour, and a widespread acceptance of non-material values as of higher importance than possessions, have come to be the expression in ordinary society of true Indian culture.

CHAPTER IV

CULTURAL CONTINUITY

A seed takes its own quiet time to germinate and grow into a big tree. Before quick and easy modern methods of communication were available, people mostly walked to get anywhere and Indians used to walk all over their country (as many still do). Walkers are in no hurry, and they have plenty of time to look around, and use their eyes and ears. Back and forth across India passed the contagious cultural ideas which everywhere eventually took root and came to flower in a typically Indian way of life. Long ago, enough agreement on fundamentals was reached to give the vast majority of the people a deep feeling of common unity, of belonging to a common land.

HIGHER EDUCATION

An insatiable thirst for knowledge—not only of the temporal, but also of that which is Eternal—existed in India from ancient Vedic times. In view of the respect for learning, and for its outward symbol, the Brahmin, it is not surprising that India evolved an elaborate system of higher education, in charge of Brahmins, at a very early period in her history. *Tols* and *Asramas*, and the later temple-schools attracted large numbers of students, though these were mostly confined to the privileged classes. With the passing of centuries, as Vedic Sanskrit became increasingly difficult and archaic, the students had to spend much time and energy in mastering Sanskrit grammar with the help

of Panini's famous work. Besides the Vedas, the Vedangas and grammar, the other main subjects of study were metre and poetic composition, rhetoric, and the various systems of Hindu philosophical thought. Since the Vedas were considered too sacred to be put into writing, the usual method of learning was oral. The teacher expounded, the student memorized, and what he got by heart became his own for ever.

Education was not confined solely to Brahmin schools, however. Some two thousand years ago, Tamilnad could boast of its great Sangams at Madura where ancient Tamil works were critically studied by the scholars of those days and assembled into the great collections of secular poems which constitute the largely pre-Aryan classical inheritance of the Tamilians. Buddhism and Jainism, rejecting the sacred authority of the Vedas and the special position of the Brahmins, introduced their own emphasis into education. Yet when Sanskrit was adopted as the language of Mahayana Buddhism, in about the first century A.D., Buddhist scholars had to add the study of Sanskrit to that of Pali, the sacred language of the earliest Buddhist texts. The Jains also began to use Sanskrit as their literary language at a somewhat later period. Thus Sanskrit became a potent means of binding the whole country together, both as a common language and because of the wonderfully rich Sanskrit literature.

The translation and copying of manuscripts in Buddhist monasteries became a vast industry, and monastic schools and colleges expanded at a rapid rate. Courses of instruction seem to have been extraordinarily comprehensive. They covered not only the separate sects of Buddhism (eighteen), logic, metaphysics, ritualism, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, Pali and Sanskrit, but Vedic literature and current schools of Brahmin philosophy as well. Jain schools, though less is known of them, obviously followed the same general type of curriculum, since it represented the essential culture of the day.

Centuries before the first universities of Europe came

into existence, India had developed famous centres of higher education in many widely separated parts of the country. In Gandhara in the far north-west, as early as the sixth century B.C., Takshasila—Taxila, as the Greeks called it (now in Pakistan)—attracted students from all over India. Its courses in military science were especially useful for the sons of kings. In later centuries, Srinagar, in Kashmir, took its place as the great northern seat of learning and Pundits flocked thither from far and near. Sravasti, Kasi, Pataliputra, Nalanda, Vikramasila, Somapuri (Paharpur) and Tamluk were the famous centres of higher studies in what are now Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. Ujjain in western Malwa, Padmavati near modern Gwalior, Vanavasi in the Konkan, and Valabhi and Palitana in Saurashtra were the principal centres in Central and Western India. Andhra had its Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda. In South India, besides Madura, there was Kanchi, or Conjeeveram. During the period of Pallava supremacy, between the fourth and ninth centuries A.D., Kanchi was the greatest university town of southern India.

It was from centres like these that a stream of Indian scholars and teachers went out across the mountains and seas to distant lands of Asia in the early centuries of the Christian era, carrying with them the great religious and cultural ideas of India, which profoundly influenced the civilizations of Indonesia, Burma, Siam, Indo-China, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and Nepal. The Indian universities also made possible the immense literary output of religious commentaries, law-books, poetic compositions, dramas, tales, moral guides, technical treatises and abstruse philosophic works, practically all in Sanskrit, which were the high stamp of Indian culture in those early times.

An interesting picture of Nalanda as it existed in the first part of the seventh century has come down from the writing-brush of the famous Chinese Buddhist scholar, Yuan Chwang, who spent fourteen years in India, including five in residence at Nalanda. Although there were no fewer than 5,000 students on the rolls in his time, including some

who had travelled all the way from China, Korea and Tibet, it seems that the entrance examinations were so stiff that not even a third of those actually clamoring for admission could get in! Needy students, we are told, received free tuition, board, lodging, medical attention, and even clothes. There were a hundred lecture halls. As for Nalanda's great collection of manuscripts, the main attraction for foreign students, it was so huge that it had to be housed in three separate buildings in a special library quarter known as the 'mart of knowledge'.

How irreparable to India was the destruction of some of her ancient seats of learning by untutored conquerors! Taxila was destroyed by the Huns in the fifth century, Nalanda and Vikramasila by hordes from Central Asia and Afghanistan in the opening years of the thirteenth century. Unfortunately, at that time, no learned Al-Biruni was present to save the manuscripts. Those of Nalanda were totally destroyed, and the Muslim chronicler describes how at Vikramasila, after all the shaven-headed monks had been put to the sword in 1203, not a single inmate survived to explain the contents of the many books found lying there. Later, the invaders discovered that Vikramasila was not the fortress they had imagined it to be, but a college.

When the Sultans had firmly established their rule at Delhi, many of them displayed a cultured appreciation of learning, if mainly of Turkish, Arabic and Persian learning. The eccentric Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq lavished incredible sums on the maintenance of mosque-schools in Delhi in the fourteenth century, and his reputation as a patron of learning and culture was such that poets and scholars flocked to the Indian capital from all parts of Asia, and even from North Africa. In the fifteenth century, the great minister of the Bahmani dynasty in the Deccan, Mahmud Gavan, spent his personal fortune in building a *madrasah* at Bidar, to which was attached a library containing his magnificent collection of 3,000 volumes.

In the same way, Indian kings, throughout the medieval period, were patrons of higher education.

Among some of the well-known institutions founded by them were the famous Sanskrit college at Dhar, established by Bhoja Parmara in the early part of the eleventh century, and a college for the study of astronomy founded in Khandesh by the Yadava king, Singhana, in the thirteenth century. Every king took pride in making his own court a miniature focus of culture. Poets, musicians, dramatists and scholars were always sure of the generous support of Indian kings.

SPIRIT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

An old Pali work, the *Milinda Panha*, or 'Questions of Milinda', tells us that in the second century B.C. the streets of Sakala (Sialkot), then the capital of the Indo-Greek king Menander, or Milinda, were continually resounding "with cries of welcome to teachers of every creed". Such religious tolerance was characteristic of India. In medieval times, great public debates were frequently held at which the followers of different religious sects and schools of philosophic thought presented their views. Yuan Chwang attended one such huge conference organized by Harsha Vardhana of Kanauj in the seventh century, and the foreign scholar was given the singular honour of presiding. Several thousand Buddhist monks of both the Hinayana and Mahayana schools were present, and no fewer than three thousand Brahmins and Jains! Harsha was converted to Mahayana Buddhism after hearing the brilliant exposition of Yuan Chwang. One reads of Tamil kings likewise converted from Jainism to the Saiva or Vaishnava forms of faith, after listening to similar Jain-Hindu debates in the South Indian capitals. This type of serious debate, conducted in an orderly and decorous manner, indicates the highly cultured state of mind obtaining in medieval India.

It was by means of public debates, as well as through his profound philosophical writings in Sanskrit, that Sankaracharya, the great South Indian Brahmin of Kerala, born probably in the eighth century A.D., brought about

the lasting revival of Hinduism. He went up and down the country, even visiting Kashmir and the remote regions of the Himalayas, meeting his principal opponents, the Buddhists, in keen intellectual contests and everywhere defeating them. By his time Buddhism was showing signs of debasement and with his unmatched intellect and penetrating knowledge, he cut at the root of much confused speculation and dry scholasticism, and gave back to India the essential doctrine of *Brahman*, the one-without-a-second.

Yet Sankara described the manifesting and dynamic agent of the formless *Brahman* as the supreme Personal God, his own preference being for Siva, god of the Yogis and Sannyasis. For ordinary men he approved the use of images and rituals. Sankara's own hymns to Siva and the Mother of the Universe reverberate down the ages. He also insisted that no man, by reason of caste alone, should be debarred from the knowledge of the Ultimate. After Sankara, Buddhism rapidly declined, and the Vedanta philosophy of the unity of soul, with minor variations and modifications, was accepted as the fundamental background of thought in practically every Hindu sect. Sankara's commentaries on the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita also restored these as the sacred, authoritative texts. Before his death, at the young age of thirty-two, Sankara founded four *maths* for Hindu Sannyasis on the four sides of India—Puri, Dwarka, Sringeri and Badrinath, thus fostering, in a practical way, the spiritual unity of the country.

DIFFUSION OF GENERAL CULTURE

If this was the type of higher thought possible in India for educated persons more than a thousand years ago, no less remarkable was the widely diffused culture of the masses. Access to Vedic texts was traditionally forbidden to a considerable part of the population, including Sudras and women, but there was never any ban on the popular dissemination of the highest religious truths through popular works. A thousand and one subjects were treated

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in the inexhaustible reservoir of the two great Sanskrit Epics, the Puranas, the Pancharatras, the Agamas, the Tantras, the Niti Sastras, the Silpa Sastras, and similar productions. They were the vast treasures of the people, both in matters of religion and education. In particular, the Epics and the Puranas, current in some form at least as early as 500 B.C. and given their present and final form not later than 500 A.D., embodied almost everything that had ever been thought or experienced in India from remotest antiquity. Here was the enduring inspiration of the Indian people.

While Valmiki's Ramayana is limited to the single theme of the exploits of Rama as Aryan prince and hero, the Mahabharata and the Puranas embrace the whole universe of gods and men. Brahma, the creator; Vishnu (more especially in his Incarnations of Rama and Krishna) upholding the universe and bestowing salvation on his devotees; the mighty Siva, destroyer of illusion; Devi, his Sakti, represented as the Divine Mother of the Universe under many names and forms; their two sons Ganesa and Karttikeya; and all the other gods and goddesses and lesser heavenly beings, play their intricate roles, often descending to earth and entering into the affairs of men so that the latter may come to love them, and learn to discriminate between that which is transient and that which is eternal.

Here, too, in the popular literature, is a vast collection of old stories, legends and myths, royal genealogies, records of historical happenings, descriptions of sacred rivers, mountains and all the holy places of pilgrimage, accounts of the undying *rishis* in their hermitages, explanations of the frame-work of creation, of the theory of the ever-recurring cycles and great *kalpas* of Time, of rebirth and *Karma*. All the heroes of India and all the gods are here, along with accounts of their heavens, and edifying instructions for the proper worship of the gods. Here are poetry, entertainment, philosophy and religion, for all, without an exception. When one remembers that the Bhagvad Gita is only a leaf out of the gigantic forest of the Mahabharata,

one faintly appreciates the incalculable influence of India's Epic literature on her cultural history.

Villages are still visited by Brahmin story-tellers and wandering holy men who read aloud, or paraphrase and dramatize, stories from the Epics and Puranas to spell-bound audiences. Century after century, the whole of India has derived inspiration and entertainment from such recitations and dramas built round the eternal themes of gods, *rishis* and beloved national heroes. To this day, the Ramlila on a grand scale is an annual feature of even the sophisticated life of Delhi, while the towns and villages of Rama's 'home country', Uttar Pradesh, likewise re-enact every year the chief episodes of the Ramayana.

The wonderful characters live eternally in the minds and hearts of the people. Rama is the ideal king, Sita the ideal wife, Bharat and Lakshman are outstanding examples of brotherly love and loyalty, Mahavira is the perfect *karmayogi* and *bhakta*, in the body of a monkey (though mythologically the son of a god). The great Pandavas and the noble Draupadi, Savitri whose love defied Death himself, Damayanti, Sakuntala, and all the others, show the way of fearlessness, truthfulness, faithfulness, and unselfish devotion to duty. They have taught India its basic social ideals and have set the pattern of the ideal character. This indeed is the living culture of the people today.

VERNACULAR TRANSLATIONS OF EPICS AND PURANAS

How unifying has been the influence of Epics and Puranas can be gathered from the number of translations made from the Sanskrit into the various regional Indian languages. The following list, far from complete, will give some idea of the vitality of the all-India tradition. A Tamil translation of the Skanda Purana dates probably from the eighth century, and the first Tamil Mahabharata belongs to about the same period. In the eleventh century, Kamban produced the first Tamil Ramayana. Two Jain authors,

Adipampa and Abhinava Pampa, of the tenth and twelfth centuries, were responsible for abridged versions in Kannada of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Inspired by them, Nannaya Bhatta, requested to do so by the reigning Eastern Chalukya sovereign, began a Telugu adaptation of the Mahabharata in the eleventh century, the earliest known work in the Telugu language. This translation was continued by Tikkana in the thirteenth century, and finally concluded by Yerrapreggada in the fourteenth. Meanwhile, a Telugu Ramayana also appeared, and Potana, a disciple of Tikkana, produced exceedingly popular Telugu versions of several of the Puranas. In Malayalam also, similar translations and adaptations, at first derived from Tamil sources, date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In northern India, Kirtibas Ojha had the honour of producing the first Bengali Ramayana in the fourteenth century, and other versions, with an abridged Bengali Mahabharata, soon followed. The first Bengali Bhagavatam was the work of Maladhar Basu. It was written during the fifteenth century at the order of the Muslim ruler of Bengal, Sultan Husain Shah. The beginning of Assamese literature, in the thirteenth century, took the form of renderings of selections and elaborated incidents from the Puranas and the Mahabharata. In the next century appeared a remarkably faithful Assamese translation of the Ramayana by Madhava Kandali, and in the fifteenth, partial versions of the Bhagavatam and Ramayana, as well as a compilation of various Puranas and the Gita, by Sankar Deva. A full translation of the Mahabharata was achieved during the following century by Ram Saraswati. Two Sudra authors of the fifteenth century, Saroldas and Balramdas, produced the first Oriya versions of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which were followed shortly by an Oriya Bhagavatam. Finally, in the sixteenth century, the star of Tulsidas rose in the sky of northern India. His free Hindi version of the Ramayana, the *Ramacharitamanasa*, has superseded Valmiki's original in popularity throughout most of northern India.

To round off the summary, the first English translation of the *Māhabharata* is also worthy of mention, a nineteenth century undertaking of love by the Bengali scholar, Pratap Chandra Roy. A definitive Sanskrit edition of the *Mahabharata*, based on the collation and study of all known early manuscripts, is now nearing completion, after twenty years of strenuous labour, at the Bhandarkar Institute at Poona.

Besides direct translations and fairly close adaptations, innumerable original poems, both in Sanskrit and in regional languages, took their inspiration from the same sources. It seemed that the people were never tired of hearing the old tales. Kings and kingdoms came and went, dynasties rose and fell, but beneath the superficial changes and vicissitudes of political destiny, the people, through common religious symbols and myths, common spiritual values and common social institutions, remained firmly integrated.

IMAGES AND TEMPLES

Art was another important expression of the common culture. Buddhist art radiated a spirit of tranquil other-worldliness, or in the narrative art, based on the *Jatakas* and similar source materials, a naive and charming naturalism, while Jain images suggested the immobility of death itself. Hindu images, on the other hand, though probably very often the work of the same craftsmen, were disturbingly vital in their effect. Intensely human in action, they were at the same time always much more than human. No attempt was ever made to turn the Hindu gods into mere mortals. Their divinity, as described in the *Puranas*, was unmistakably indicated in many ways. They were given multiple arms or heads, or the all-seeing Third Eye, symbolic of their supernatural power. Some of them were distinguished by heads of animals on human bodies. As the terrible and the beautiful were both viewed as eternal aspects of world and life, created by the gods themselves, so the gods were frequently depicted in forms terrifying

to behold. In all this, there was nothing appalling or inconsistent to the Hindu mind, steeped as it was in the immensities of Puranic imagery. The symbolism was already fixed, and the artists merely selected from the infinite storehouse the obviously dramatic episodes, established the artistic conventions and popularized the themes by endless repetition. Different schools of sculpture arose in different parts of the country, but their local variations were mainly due to the nature of the different materials available and the resulting differences in technical treatment. The themes were everywhere the same. The types of each god and goddess, with their familiar attributes and accompanying animal or bird, were established once for all, and no Hindu ever felt strange in their presence. Hindu religious art—and there was no other—excluded nothing from its purview, and in all its manifold expression continually reminded the worshipper of the endless symbolic play of the gods.

Though temples and images had not formed a part of Vedic ritual, they came into wide use in India from the time of their first adoption by Mahayana Buddhists. Earlier, Buddhists had revered the Buddha as a Great Teacher and Leader, but had not deified him. When they wished to indicate his presence in their sculptures, as for instance in the beautiful gateways of the great Sanchi Stupa in Bhopal, they did so not by any physical representation but by reticent symbols such as foot-prints, the Bodhi tree, or the Stupa, signifying the Mahanirvana.

A fundamental change was introduced when in the North doctrines of the Greater Vehicle supplanted those of the Smaller Vehicle. A whole hierarchy of Buddhist divinities now suddenly became the object of intense worship, and Nirvana was translated into a crowded Buddhist heaven. The foreign Kushans, converted to the Mahayana form of Buddhism in the first century A.D., were literal and objective in their worship and, for the first time in India, the Buddha image appeared in Gandharan art. The Kushans even impressed the standing image of Buddha

on some of their coins, with the Greek name *Boddo* inscribed on one side.

The outward expression of theistic and devotional feeling in India at this time clearly met an inner psychological need. By the first years of Kanishka's reign, image-making had spread as far as Mathura, the southern capital of the Kushan empire. Statues of Buddha and *Bodhisattvas*, carved from Mathura sandstone and evidently intended for niches in temples and shrines, were transported to distant places, and a century or two later were being turned out in great numbers at Banaras, in the heart of the Gupta empire, as well as in Buddhist centres in Andhra, like Amaravati. Jain images of the Tirathankaras date from about the same period. As might have been expected, images of Hindu gods and goddesses, in their hundreds of thousands, also began to pour out from the Indian workshops, to satisfy the eager desire of worshippers for a visual representation of their deities. A new phase in India's cultural development came into being with this prolific artistic activity. And since images require a permanent habitation, temples, together with the elaborate rituals of worship connected with them, began to develop on a grand scale.

India's earliest surviving temples are rock-cut Mahayana Buddhist Chaityas, or worship-halls, hollowed out from solid rocks or cliffs, in imitation of wooden prototypes which have long since vanished. Such halls, originally Hinayana image-less Chaityas, were modified to Mahayana use in the great Buddhist monastic retreat of Ajanta, perhaps in the second century A.D. Jain cave retreats were even older, but it is difficult to call any of them temples. Hindus, copying the Buddhists, began to make cave temples during the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, dedicating them to Vishnu, Siva or Durga. Such excavated temples exist in Central India at Badami, at Mammallapuram and elsewhere in the Tamil country, at Ellora and Aurangabad in the Deccan, and at Elephanta on Salsette Island in Bombay Harbour.

The construction of Hindu masonry temples, on the testimony of standing remains, began in the Gupta period. Of brick or stone, the Gupta temples were small, consisting of a single flat-roofed cell a few feet square for enshrining the image, with a shallow porch in front. After the disintegration of the Gupta empire, local dynasties all over India assumed independence and a craze of temple building swept India, continuing until it was rudely checked by the Muslim conquest. Once more, as in the case of sculptors, distinct schools of architecture arose in different parts of the country, to add their glorious chapters to India's creative achievements. Some of the great medieval temples lie in gray, ruined heaps thrown down by the inexorable hand of time (though more often than not by the wanton hand of man), but some are still nobly intact, frequented by devout Hindus today exactly as they have been for the past thousand years and more.

As the Chalukyas in the Deccan and the Pallavas in the Tamil country were experimenting with the early type of Dravidian temple tower, rising in receding, heavily-carved tiers to a bulbous pinnacle high above the main shrine, the Karkota kings of Kashmir were erecting the largest stone temples yet seen in India, in the mixed Gandhara style dominated by late Graeco-Roman influences. Then followed, in the South, the magnificently huge temples of the Chola kings, the exquisite star-shaped Hoysala temples of Mysore, the incredibly ornate temples of Vijayanagar, and the Pandya temples, with their overpowering *gopurams*, *mandapas* of a thousand pillars, splendid arcaded tanks for sacred ablutions, and awesome, shadowy galleries lined with double rows of pillars hundreds of feet long.

Northern India over the same period was equally energetic and ambitious. Temples, great and small, distinguished by the tall Indo-Aryan type of tower, in varied styles, lie thickly strewn from Bengal to Gujarat, but the destruction was naturally greater in the North than it ever was in the South. Many beautiful temples were broken and desecrated by the early invaders, and were even used

as building quarries for mosques put up in their place. Nevertheless, some of the finest Hindu temples were actually erected at the very time when the invasions were taking place, and have miraculously escaped destruction. The huge Orissan temples at Bhuvaneswar and Puri, more than thirty in number, were built between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, while the fine Khajuraho temples, also thirty in number, were constructed by the Chandela rajas over the hundred year period from 1050 to 1150 A.D., in what is now Vindhya Pradesh.

Apart from their religious significance, temples served as a natural focus of community life, whether in a village or a great city. In the past, they provided a powerful stimulus to the economic life of vast areas. Hundreds of thousands of masons and sculptors were permanently employed in their construction. Metal workers contributed images of gold, silver, copper, brass or bronze. Goldsmiths fashioned rich ornaments for the deities, and the finest silks, brocades and muslins were used in their worship. Countless lamps, tons of incense, daily offerings of garlands and enormous quantities of flowers, vast amounts of food, elaborate ingredients for the ritual bath of the deity, with Ganga water (sometimes brought by special carriers in relays from hundreds of miles away), had all to be regularly supplied. As for the ritual of the worship, this was of course performed by thousands of hereditary Brahmin priests, but the services of temple dancers, musicians and actors, as well as potters, washermen, barbers and innumerable other humble folk, were also required. In other words, the Hindu temples, supported by royal grants, donations from guilds, gifts from rich merchants and the humble offerings of the poor, gave steady employment to large groups of the population, and helped to integrate the religious and cultural activities of the whole community.

PILGRIMAGES

Though regular temple worship was never compulsory

in Hinduism, and was even restricted due to the orthodoxy of the priesthood, the *melas* and special annual celebrations made famous temples highly popular places of pilgrimage, especially those associated with some sacred *tirtha*, as described in the Puranas. Pilgrimages to the *tirthas* have been going on ceaselessly in India for untold centuries.

The materialistic world of today may not understand the living faith which impels millions of Hindus to set out on long and arduous journeys to the sources of the great rivers, their confluences, the spots held sacred along their banks, lakes, and springs, the Himalayas and other mountains or caves sanctified by hoary legends. From the extreme South, they travel to the icy caves in the North, where the Ganga and the Yamuna take their rise, to Badri and Kedar in the Himalayas, to Siva's heaven on Mount Kailasa, in the bleak tableland of Tibet. From the North, they travel all the way to Rameswaram, to worship the Sivalinga which tradition says was established by Ramachandra. The whole of India, indeed, belongs to the pilgrims, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin.

They are mostly poor, though rajas and ranis will be found among them. Many are old. A great many are women, and not a few are blind or lame. Yet they proceed undaunted, disdainful of discomfort, intent only on the goal, buoyed up by faith and devotion. They are certain that somehow a plunge into the icy waters will purify them of their sins, or that the invisible gods or *rishis*, to whom they bow down in prayerful supplication, will grant their heart's desire. Where else would fifty lakhs of people converge from every nook and corner of the land for such a bathing festival as the Kumbh Mela, the great twelfth-year gathering, held in turn at Prayag, Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain? This is the India of the people, still vital, still real.

UNIFYING FORCE OF *Bhakti*

It is a significant fact that throughout Indian history, India has invariably applied her own spiritual correctives

whenever social and religious customs and conventions have become impossibly oppressive. The free movement of Upanishadic thought counterbalanced the rigidly controlled Vedic rituals of sacrifice. Buddhism and Jainism opened their doors to all, just when Brahmin orthodoxy had shut its own against many. Along with medieval temple ritualism, in which caste exclusiveness was observed, a new liberating force was found in *Bhakti*, the path of selfless love for a Supreme Lord, by which the highest spiritual union with the Divine was held to be attainable without regard to caste, sex, race or any outward form of religious observance whatever. It depended neither on ritual, nor on sacrifice, nor on learning, nor on the performance of pilgrimages, nor on visits to temples, but on the eager yearning for it and on the pure love of the devotee. The Guru, who had himself realized spiritual truth, was the disciple's guide along the path best suited to him.

Teachers, mystics and singing saints arose in great numbers to preach the new doctrine of *Bhakti*, a few of them from among those very classes which were held in low esteem on account of their humble birth. Discarding Sanskrit, the saints began to use the language of the people among whom they lived. The people listened, and the songs of the saints still ring on their lips. Every village knows at least some of them.

All the great religious and philosophic systems of thought in ancient India arose in the North. Now, suddenly, it was the Aryanized South which produced not only a Sankaracharya but the earliest of those singing saints who, taking their inspiration from the Gita, turned the heart of India in a new direction—that of monotheistic worship of one Supreme Lord. Whether the Supreme as the manifesting power of the impersonal *Brahman* was visualised as Siva, Sakti or Vishnu, or any one of Vishnu's Incarnations, the language of *bhakti* was the same. The stream, fed by many springs, became a mighty river, flooding India.

As the emotional mood spread, various Hindu sects arose, and main sects became subdivided into a number of

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minor ones. Yet the old Indian tradition of tolerance prevailed, and there were very few instances of religious persecution. Particular dynasties might favour one form of religion in preference to another, as indicated by the building of royal temples dedicated to special deities, but it seemed that Asoka's edict on religious tolerance was not forgotten, and there was no attempt to impose a State religion on the people of any particular area. Moreover, the various sects reacted strongly upon one another, borrowing and exchanging many fundamental ideas. Unity in variety still remained the living watch-word.

SAINTS, MYSTICS AND REFORMERS

Thousands of Tamil hymns by Vaishnava and Saiva saints, some of them as early as the seventh century, have come down as a fountainhead of exalted devotional literature. The twelve earliest Vaishnava saints, or Alvars, included a king of Malabar and the woman saint Goda, but the greatest of the early Tamil Vaishnavas was Nammalvar, a farmer by caste. Most famous of the Saivite saints of Tamilnad, traditionally sixty-three in number, were Appar, Sambandha, Sundaramurti and Manikka Vachaka. The Tiruvachakam of the latter is the high-water mark of early Tamil Saivite poetry. Although a Brahmin by birth, the boy saint Sambandha used to go from village to village singing his inspired songs, accompanied by an untouchable musician and his wife whom he had accepted as disciples. Both the Saiva and the Vaishnava *bhaktas* also developed their own elaborate philosophical systems, which gave strength to their organizations. Ramanuja, the great Vaishnava teacher of South India during the eleventh century, gave to Vaishnavism a firm philosophical basis, described as "qualified non-dualism" in contrast to Sankara's monism, and he also organized the Vaishnavas of India into seventy-four dioceses and appointed a pious householder as the head of each.

The spirit of *bhakti*, or the worship of one Lord, pervaded the whole of India and found vivid and beautiful expression in the fervid religious poetry of the medieval saints and mystics, no matter what particular brand of faith they professed. Their literary compositions had the effect of uniting the people in their inner life, as nothing else could have done. At the same time, they greatly stimulated the development of the regional languages of India, which increasingly began to replace Sanskrit.

In Maharashtra, over a period of five hundred years, between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, many saints arose, including Jnaneswara, Namadeva, Ekanath, Tukaram and Ramdas. Namadeva was originally a tailor and Tukaram the son of a ruined Sudra grain-merchant. It was the genius of these saints, especially Jnaneswara, which largely shaped the Marathi language. Krishna was widely worshipped as Vithoba throughout Maharashtra, but the real message of the Marathi saints inculcated the mystic love of the God who resides in the heart of all.

The reformist Saivite sect of the Vira-Saivas, or Lingayats, who broke with the system of caste, sacrifice, images and pilgrimages, was founded in the western Deccan by Basava about the middle or end of the twelfth century, and produced a large number of Kannarese lyricists. In Kashmir, in the fourteenth century, the woman Saiva saint Lalla Yogishwari went about half-naked, dancing and singing in Kashmiri her pungent verses on the theme of divine unity. Narsimha Mehta sang of Krishna in Gujarati, in the fifteenth century. The Vaishnavas under the Vijayanagar kings of the sixteenth century found many Telugu and Kannarese poets as well as Sanskrit poets to sing on their behalf. As the whole of India was burning with the flame of religious devotion, only the absence of poets to give expression to it would have been unusual.

Medieval Bengal deserves special mention for its religious poets and saints. Except for Jayadeva, the great Vaishnava poet of the second half of the twelfth century, whose master-piece was in Sanskrit, (the *Gitagovinda*, which

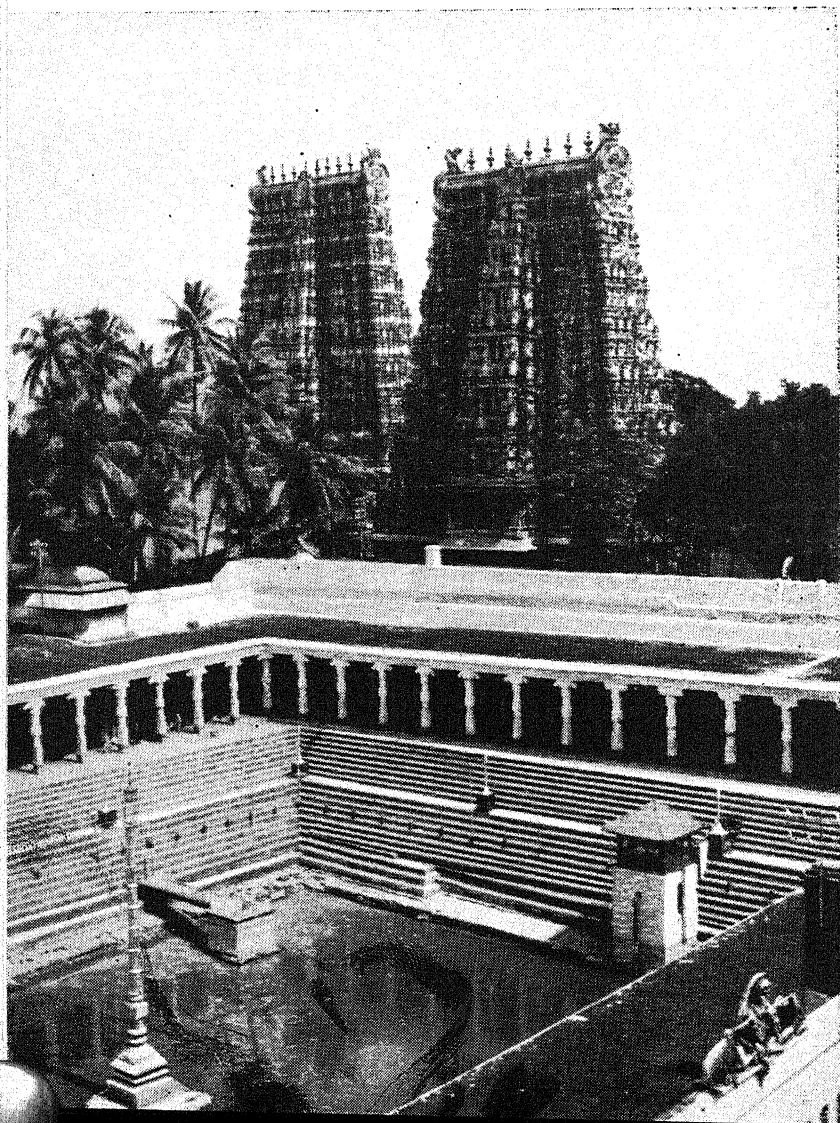
describes Radha's love for Krishna) most of the poets made use of their Bengali mother-tongue to arouse an atmosphere surcharged with passionate love for the Supreme Being. All sects flourished side by side in Bengal—Buddhism, surviving in a late form after it had perished everywhere else in India, Vaishnavism, Saivism, and above all, Saktism. The Saktas worshipped the Supreme as the Mother of the Universe, the active Female Principle. Hers was the realm of the *gunas* and the world of *maya*, and Brahma, Vishnu and Siva were subordinate to her. The Saktas observed special *tantric* mysteries and rites, primarily designed to awaken, with the help of the Guru, the coiled-up power known as the *Kundalini* that resides in every individual. Ultimately, to a lesser or greater degree, Saktism influenced all other religious sects in Bengal—even Vaishnavism—and it was sometimes difficult to make any clear distinction between the sects.

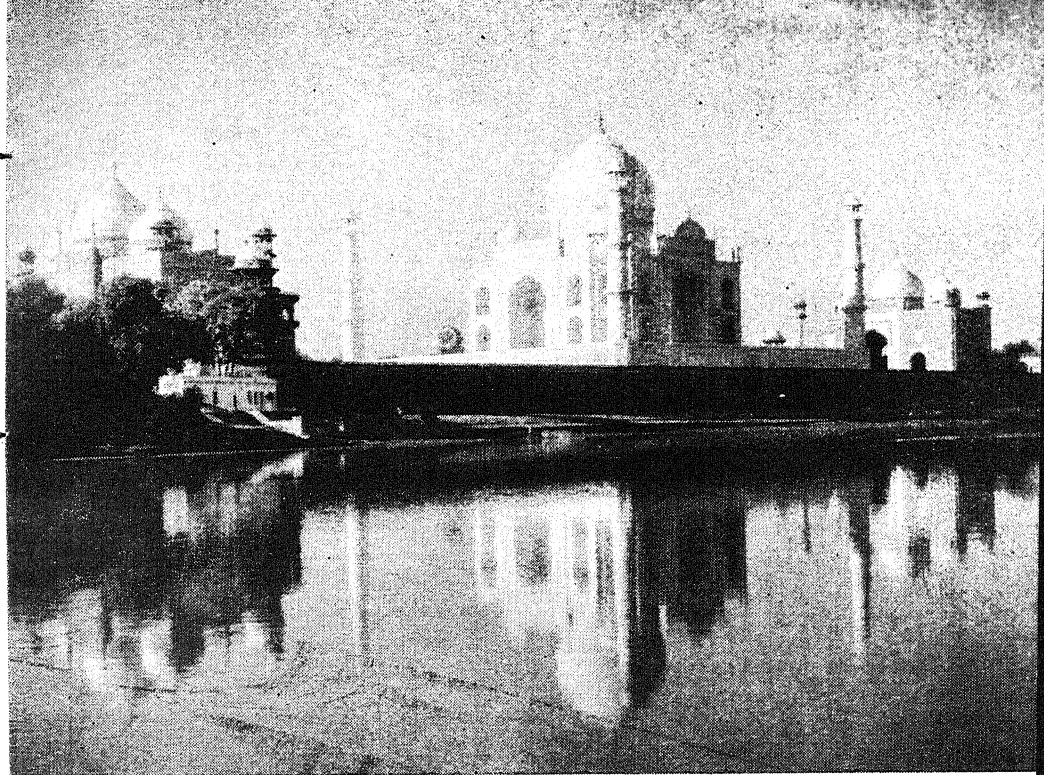
Many of the eighty-four miracle-working *siddhas* (some of whom seem to have been real persons living in the twelfth century) were claimed equally by Saivas and Buddhists. In the fourteenth century, Chandidas, excommunicated as a Brahmin because of his idealistic love for the washerwoman Rami, became a member of the esoteric Buddhist Sahajia sect, but at the same time his feelings were those of an ardent Vaishnava. He went about the villages singing his famous lyrical compositions on the Radha-Krishna theme, which are as popular today as they were in his own time. Still another Radha-Krishna poet was the polished Vidyapati, a late contemporary of Chandidas and properly speaking a Maithili, but his poetry in translation was even more appreciated in Bengal than in his native Bihar. Finally, there was Chaitanya, the greatest Vaishnava saint of Bengal, born towards the end of the fifteenth century. Though no authentic verses of his are known, his adoration of Radha-Krishna, expressed through tears, ecstatic dancing and *sankirtan*, drew thousands of followers wherever he went, for his was a love which embraced all mankind. Nor were the Saktas lacking in



Siva Nataraja
Bronze from Tanjore (12th century A.D.)

Pool of the Golden Lotus
Meenakshi Temple, Madurai (17th century A.D.)





*The Taj Mahal at Agra
White marble tomb of Mumtaz Mahal built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jehan
(17th century A.D.)*



*The saint Kabir with a disciple
A painting of the Mughal School*

impassioned poets. The *Chandi* of Kavikankan (Mukundaram Chaturvedi), dating from the sixteenth century, and Ramprasad's innumerable songs of the eighteenth century, addressed to Syama, or Kali, as the Divine Mother, are a household inspiration of millions of Bengalis today.

Naturally the rest of northern India also had its great spiritual teachers and inspired poets, whose function it was to give the people hope, strength and inner courage at precisely the time when the Muslim conquest was creating an unparalleled political and social upheaval. Here the *Bhakti* movement found many dynamic Hindi interpreters. Two of them, both belonging to the sixteenth century, whose songs about Krishna captured the hearts of all listeners, were Surdas, the blind temple musician of Agra, and Mirabai, the famous Rajput princess. Surdas, a disciple of Vallabha, composed no fewer than 60,000 Hindi verses on the Krishna story. Mirabai, who was a daughter-in-law of Rana Sanga, was apparently widowed in her youth, when her husband, Raja Bhoj, most probably lost his life in the Rajput battles against Babar in 1527. But she found solace in ecstatic devotion to her Beloved, and her rapturous songs of Krishna, equally familiar in Rajasthani, Gujarati and Hindi, are one of the great treasures of Indian music and literature.

While Krishna worshippers from the time of Chaitanya continued to identify the vital centre of their faith with the childhood home of the Divine Cowherd of Vrindavan, millions of Vaishnavas in northern India were turning towards the love of Rama, rather than Krishna, as a result of the teachings of Ramananda, and the influence of Tulsidas, the greatest of Hindi poets.

Ramananda was born in or near Banaras about the beginning of the fifteenth century, and was a follower of the Vaishnava school of Ramanuja and a Sanskrit scholar of repute. He showed his independence of thought in his strong opposition to sectarianism and rites, in his choice of Rama as the highest Incarnation of the Lord, and in his desire to have his disciples adopt Hindi, instead of Sanskrit, to propagate the Vaishnava teachings. Moral and ethical

conduct were insisted upon by him as the surest way of obtaining the grace of spiritual salvation. He refused to recognize social inequalities and even the barriers of different religions, accepting among his direct disciples a cobbler, a barber, a Jat peasant and a Muslim weaver.

Tulsidas was so deeply influenced by Ramananda, though his time was considerably later, that he is generally considered to be at least in the indirect line of discipleship. It was he who carried the Vaishnava teachings of Ramananda into every home and village of northern India, through his great literary work in Hindi, the *Ramacharitamanasa*, begun in Banaras on March 30th, 1574, according to his own statement in the text. Tulsidas made full use of Valmiki's Ramayana as the base for his long poem, but he glorified Rama throughout as the Personal and Supreme God, who incarnated himself out of love and compassion for the sake of suffering humanity, and he filled his verses with definite religious instructions for the people. Tulsidas's Ramayana sank into the consciousness of the whole of northern India, which became thoroughly saturated with it.

Quite different in expression and outlook was the most original of Ramananda's direct disciples, the Muslim weaver Kabir. Kabir was not only a saint but a stern reformer, hating religious cant and hypocrisy, as can be gathered from his terse and often caustic verses which are still sung all over Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab. Whatever the myth regarding his birth, there is no doubt that Kabir was brought up in the household of a poor Muhammadan weaver's family of Banaras, where he learned his humble trade which he continued to practice even after he had met his Guru, Ramananda. His rejection of rituals and image-worship might well have been inspired by the tenets of orthodox Islam, and his ridicule of caste might as easily have sprung from the underlying Islamic doctrine of social democracy. But when he attacked fasts and ablutions and pilgrimages as useless performances, and found the outward insignia of religion just so much foolishness, he attacked both orthodox Islam and orthodox Hinduism. Added to this, he proclaimed

that Allah and Rama were names of one and the same God, that God was to be found neither in the temple nor in the mosque, neither in Banaras nor in Mecca, but only in the heart of his devotee. This was more the language of a Sufi than anything else, and in using it Kabir drew to himself both Muslim and Hindu disciples.

Sufism, indeed, was quite familiar to fifteenth century India, and Kabir must often have come in contact with wandering Sufis. Its strange mixture of unorthodox Islam, Advaita Vedanta, Arab mysticism, Persian romanticism, Greek Neo-Platonism, Nestorian Christianity, and intense *bhakti* for the formless God, attracted personalities like his, which recognized no geographical boundaries and refused to be fettered by dogma or creed. This was the language which came nearest to bridging the gulf between Hindus and Muslims in the fifteenth century. When Kabir died, so the story goes, his Muslim disciples wanted to bury his body and his Hindu disciples to cremate it. The wrangling continued until, on lifting the sheet, they found that the body of the dead saint had miraculously disappeared. Only a heap of lotus flowers remained, which the disciples reverently divided into two equal portions.

Kabir's influence extended far beyond the group of his own disciples, who soon formed themselves into the sect of Kabirpanthis which is still in existence. Practically all his teachings were accepted by his younger contemporary, Guru Nanak, and incorporated into the Sikh religion as founded by Nanak. Nanak, like Kabir, was a practical mystic. He looked upon Islam and Hinduism as two paths to God, and on ceremonials, image-worship and caste as hindrances in the path to God. His whole emphasis was on the love for One God, dwelling formless within the heart. He further proclaimed that the life of the householder, earning his living by honest labour, was superior to that of the ascetic. Both Kabir and Nanak married and had children.

When Arjun, fifth in the line of Sikh Gurus, collected the writings of earlier Gurus and compiled the *Adi-Granth*, the sacred book of the Sikhs, in 1604, many devotional hymns

of Vaishnava saints were included. Poems of Namdev and Tukaram, of Ramananda, of Kabir, and of his cobbler disciple Ravidas, all form part of the sacred Granth. But Kabir's Hindi stanzas which are included number more than a thousand, showing the great part he played in the early development of Sikhism in the Punjab, before the tenth and last Guru, Govind Singh, transformed the Sikhs into the militant community of the Khalsa, at the end of the seventeenth century.

Another saint and mystic who reflected Kabir's influence was Dadu, the cotton-cleaner of Ahmedabad, born in the middle of the sixteenth century. He breathed the same free air as Kabir, though the latter died twenty-six years before Dadu was born. In one of his psalms, Dadu says, "The illusion of Allah and Rama hath been dispelled from my mind; since I see Thee in all, I see no difference between Hindu and Turk.' Once, it is said, Dadu was summoned to discuss religion for forty days with the great Mughal emperor, Akbar. A few years before Guru Arjun compiled the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, Dadu requested his disciples to gather together songs and hymns from Hindu, Islamic and Sufi sources which could help the devotee in his search for the universal God. This was perhaps the first collection of its kind in the world.

Kabir, Nanak and Dadu were all extraordinarily free spirits, with a breadth of spiritual horizon and freedom from any taint of religious bigotry or sectarianism, remarkable in any age. They tried to assuage religious quarrels and did their best to bring Hindus and Muslims and all other sects together.

Akbar himself, in spite of an incessantly active life as soldier, administrator and emperor of India was remarkably in tune with the spirit of universalism as expressed by Indian mystics of the sixteenth century. He would have liked to find the spiritual bond to make all men brothers, not merely those within the fold of Islam. He sent for men of every sort of religious persuasion—Sunni, Sufi, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Christian—and in the *Ibadatkhana*, in his red

palace at Fatehpur Sikri, he listened through long nights to their animated discussions and arguments, during which each attacked the other's faith and passionately defended his own. Akbar did not find what he sought, and his attempt to found a new synthetic religion, with himself as the spiritual head, failed rather pathetically. Nor did any of his successors share his questing spirit. Tolerance in administration, as well as in religion, ceased to be a characteristic of later Mughal rule. And under the British Raj which replaced it, the new rulers were too remote in thought from the Indian people even to have any wish to enter into their inner life.

At last, after the long hiatus, India is again free to set about creating a new synthesis in her national life, a synthesis which must assuredly take into account not only the religious ideals and cultural traditions of the long past, but the changing social and economic conditions of today, and the emerging needs of the future.

CHAPTER V

MODERN SYNTHESIS

There is nothing in Indian tradition opposed to religious, social, educational and economic reforms. It has been shown how one great religious leader after another, from the time of Buddha onwards, stepped forward to deny, by his own living example, the supposed sanctity of orthodox rules and customs which did injury to the spirit or soul of man. During the long period of foreign subjection, many changes were forced upon India, and some of these have now been accepted as part of the national mode of life. As the feeling of bitterness dies away, it is possible to view the trying period of both the Muhammadan and British conquests in a fresh perspective, and to discover that the foreigners also, in many ways, consciously and unconsciously, helped India to prepare for the necessary transition from a medieval to a modern State.

Like Buddhism of old, both Islam and Christianity offered ways of social escape from too oppressive caste regulations. Within Islam, all followers of the Prophet were considered equal, and a man had the opportunity to rise to any position he had the capacity to fill. Even Muslim slaves, through their own inherent ability, became mighty rulers of India. Naturally, many conversions to Islam, particularly from among the lower Hindu classes, took place during the period of Muslim domination. The democratic spirit of Islamic society was further manifested in the Quranic injunction for the regular collection of *zakat*, a religious tax on the rich for the benefit of the poor and

needy. The unorthodox Sufi doctrines, which had much in common with the free spirit of Vedanta and *Bhakti*, also did something to lessen religious antagonisms between Hindus and Muslims of a certain type. Later, under the British, Western democratic ideas gained wide currency. The new schools opened by Christian missionaries, though favouring conversion to Christianity, imparted modern knowledge, and they particularly filled the vacuum in regard to the education of girls and those to whom the privileges of education had been totally denied. The building of hospitals was among their other humanitarian activities and it answered a universal need and benefited the country as a whole.

Material and industrial development, even in the interests of British investors, automatically helped to break down social prejudices. Water piped to cities and towns, the introduction of municipal sanitation, public transport systems in which anyone who bought a ticket was entitled to a seat in a train, bus or tram, the mills and factories in which the dead hand of tradition was helplessly unable to decree the caste of a man operating modern machinery, newspapers, the spread of English education, the speeding up of world communications, the dissemination of the concept of political democracy, and a measure of democratic institutions grudgingly introduced into India in response to the growing demand, toward the close of British rule, all inevitably tended to loosen fixed habits and customs. Many far-sighted Indians arose who saw the necessity for a profound change in the political, social and economic outlook of the people, if India was to regain her place among the great nations of the world.

One of the earliest of this vanguard of modern thinkers was Ram Mohan Roy. Born in a Bengali Brahmin family, he had already made up his mind by the age of seventeen that popular Hinduism needed a thorough overhauling. His Sanskrit study of the Upanishads confirmed his faith in one formless Supreme Deity, and he vigorously began to oppose image-worship and sought to free Hindu society from its

dependence on the offices of priests. In his eager pursuit of knowledge, he became a great student of languages, acquiring mastery over Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, English, Urdu, Greek and Hebrew, apart from his own Bengali. His first published work, characteristically enough, was a treatise on monotheism, written in Persian, with an introduction in Arabic.

Although he took service under the East India Company still ruling Bengal, he carried on a continuous campaign to end rampant social abuses and bring about a general reawakening in India. He bitterly attacked the cruel practice of Suttee—self-immolation of widows—much in vogue in Bengal in his time, and showed by citation of ancient texts that it had no scriptural injunction, as many pretended. Thus encouraged by his able support, Lord William Bentinck, then Governor-General of India, finally abolished the practice by law, in 1829. Ram Mohan Roy also worked untiringly for freedom of press and speech, and for education in the English language, so that Indians might acquire, as rapidly as possible, modern scientific knowledge. He urged the rights of female inheritance, advocated monogamous marriage, and fought for the legal rights of the rack-rented peasants of Bengal against the landlords. He founded journals and schools, in one of which Debendranath Tagore, father of the poet Rabindranath, became a student. In 1830, he opened in Calcutta a temple of universal faith, in fulfilment of his religious ideal. The temple, which was to be a place of public meeting and worship, “strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds,” was the start of the religious reform movement known as the Brahmo Samaj, of which Debendranath Tagore became the second leader and Keshub Chunder Sen the third.

Toward the end of 1830, Ram Mohan Roy went to England, the first high caste Hindu to go abroad in modern times. There was to be an appeal against the Suttee Act to the King-in-Council, on the ground that it was an unwarranted interference with the Hindu religion, and he wanted

to present a counter-petition to the House of Commons to prove that this pernicious custom had nothing whatever to do with religion. The Charter of the East India Company was also due for renewal, and he proposed to present arguments for enlarging the fundamental rights of the Indian people. In both objects he succeeded, before he fell ill and died in Bristol, in 1833. For his wide learning, his fearlessness, his humanitarianism and his patriotism, Ram Mohan Roy won lasting respect for India among foreign intellectuals, and left a deep impress on his compatriots at home.

A very different type of leader, the stormy Lokamanya B. G. Tilak, "honoured of the people", next began to rock India with his uncompromising demand for political freedom. Tilak was born and grew up in the period immediately following the unsuccessful Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. This left a great wave of resentment and bitterness in its wake, and to Tilak, a Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahmin, the method of direct action seemed the only solution. Taking Sivaji as a shining example of daring resourcefulness, he sought to awaken in Maharashtrians the memory of their past glory. On the occasion of a Sivaji festival which he organized in 1895, he stirred his hearers to frenzied excitement when he made the resounding declaration, "God has conferred on the foreigners no grant of Hindustan inscribed on imperishable brass." He supported a revival of orthodox Hindusim as a counterblow to the growing Westernism, and in the columns of his Marathi journal *Kesari* constantly and ruthlessly attacked the foreign ruler. Indirectly, he put forward the idea of political assassination, and when two British officials were assassinated in Poona by a young terrorist in 1897, Tilak was prosecuted for sedition, on the strength of his articles, and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment, which at once made him a hero in the eyes of the politically conscious younger generation. The revolutionary movement, thus inaugurated, spread to Bengal, which thereafter took the lead, for three decades, in violent anti-British activities.

Back in 1895, an Englishman, Allan Hume, had founded the Indian National Congress as a forum for Indian intellectuals to get together and pass resolutions in favour of mildly constitutional reforms. Tilak joined the Congress, but was dissatisfied with its endless discussions and pious resolutions, which were without any binding consequences. Instead, he urged a Swadeshi movement and a boycott of British goods. When the Congress met at Surat in 1907 for its annual session, Tilak's proposal for the immediate launching of a movement of direct action created an uproar, and a serious split in the Congress ranks occurred. Tilak and his followers withdrew, leaving the field to the Moderates. But a considerable following among the millhands of Bombay, as well as other Extremist elements in the country, had already been won over to Tilak's side. Tilak again received a heavy sentence, of six years' transportation, for his praise of a bomb outrage in Bengal in the pages of *Kesari*. After his release, he took a less active part in politics. He rejoined the Congress in 1916, but for the remaining four years of his life worked for self-government for India as a free partner in the British Empire.

Another great son of India in the nineteenth century was Swami Vivekananda. His short life was devoted, not to political agitation, but to helping India regain her lost faith in herself, and insisting that she put her own house in order. With a lion's roar, he called upon India to shake off lethargy, weakness and petty jealousies, which were the stigma of slavery, and rise to her full stature of greatness. As a student in Calcutta, he first joined the Brahmo Samaj, but his dynamic personality required something more vital than the Samaj doctrines of charity, morality, piety, tolerance, a rational religion and economic reforms. He wanted all these, and much more. He finally found his inspiration at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a Brahmin priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, close to Calcutta.

Ramakrishna was born in a humble Bengal village only three years after the death of Ram Mohan Roy. He had none of the latter's brilliant intellectualism, but a passionate

yearning to know God. Through a series of extraordinary experiments, in which he successively followed the prescribed disciplines not only of all the main Hindu sects and of Advaita Vedanta, but of Christianity and Islam also, he came to the personal realization that all religions lead to the same goal. Therefore, he denounced nothing. He did not ask Hindus to give up any of their established religious practices, or Christians their Christianity, or Muslims Islam. All religions he held to be phases of the one Eternal Religion, so many paths to God, which are followed by people according to their tendencies and inclinations. Many years later, Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face." Coming in touch with the saint of Dakshineswar at the impressionable age of eighteen, mind and heart completely captivated, the future Vivekananda became his chief disciple. After Ramakrishna's death in 1886, Vivekananda bound the little band of his brother disciples together as an order of Sannyasis, and from this beginning grew the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, with branches all over India as well as in many foreign countries today.

With prophetic vision, Vivekananda probed deep into India's needs. For years he walked the length and breadth of the country as a homeless wanderer, and came to understand the condition of the people as few have done. He found the nation drained of vigour, not through the fault of the Hindu religion, as some of the Westernized reformers were maintaining, but because those who, having knowledge, had failed to share it with the people. "I consider that the great national sin", he wrote, "is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall." He saw clearly that the days of exclusive privileges and claims on the part of the so-called higher castes were ending, but the solution of India's misery and degradation, he believed, was not to bring down the higher, but to raise the lower.

Let men go to the villages with microscopes and

globes and magic lanterns—films and television were not then invented—and give the people the benefit of a modern education, but something more than a mass of undigested information. Give them a life-making, man-making, character-making education, so that they could work out their own salvation. What India needed was practical Vedanta, combined with the democratic body of Islam and the heart of a Buddha. Let religion be expressed in living worship of “the only God that exists...the sum-total of all souls...my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species.” One can hear the anguish in his cry, “I do not believe in a God or religion that cannot wipe the widow’s tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth.”

He was equally against rank materialism and arrant superstition. “Cease to look upon every little village superstition as a mandate of the Vedas”, he ordered. Treat the Muslims as brothers. Be prepared to learn from all nations, as well as to share with them India’s wonderful spiritual heritage. Enfranchise the women, and let them be the shapers of their future destiny. Open schools and orphanages and hospitals all over the country. “Where is the money?...Where are the men? That is the question.” “The whole world has been made by the energy of man, by the power of enthusiasm, by the power of faith.” He called upon his countrymen to develop muscles of iron, nerves of steel and minds like the thunderbolt. “Go all of you”, he thundered, “wherever there is an outbreak of plague or famine, or wherever the people are in distress, and mitigate their sufferings. At the most, you may die in the attempt. What of that?”

Such was the invigorating message of Vivekananda, and he could truly say on his return from a long visit to Europe and America, whither he had gone in 1893 to speak on behalf of Vedanta at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, “Bold has been my message to the West. Bolder to those at home.” What he called his plan of campaign,

laid down sixty years ago, is almost identical with India's present programme of social reform and education.

One of the supermen Vivekananda was seeking was already there, slowly preparing himself for the immense work ahead. But the two never met. Gandhiji, the young barrister, sailed from Bombay for South Africa in 1893, at almost the same moment when Vivekananda, the yet unknown monk, sailed for America. When Gandhiji at last returned to take up his work in India, in 1915, Vivekananda had already been dead thirteen years.

Gandhiji is still so close to us that it is scarcely necessary to review the well-known details of his life. His towering personality fits into no conventional pattern. Though a politician of the first rank, he was deeply religious, and though religious, a tireless worker. After having made his early "experiments with truth" in South Africa, where he tried out and perfected his technique of non-violent non-co-operation as a political weapon to obtain justice for the oppressed community of Indian settlers who had made Africa their home, he was ready to apply his technique in India. In the end, the mighty British Raj had to yield to his novel method of persuasion, and under the banner of non-violent non-co-operation, with a minimum of bloodshed, Gandhiji led India, in a clean fight, to political freedom.

Gandhiji's uniqueness was in his character. He refused to hate anyone. Even while he fought the British Government, he continued to love Englishmen. Hindu-Muslim unity was a passionate article of faith with him, and for this he ultimately sacrificed his life. He was absolutely fearless and absolutely above board. He never failed to tell his opponents in advance of the precise weapon he intended to use on the morrow, such as the defiance of some forbidden regulation, which would inevitably mean his own imprisonment. He never asked any one to do what he would not do himself, but he demanded of his followers implicit obedience. His sense of humour, his delight in children, his uniform courtesy to all, were among the

qualities most endearing to his associates. He was austere and simple in his habits.

All the time he was waging his war of non-co-operation against the British, he was relentlessly attacking social abuses masquerading under the name of Hinduism, which he considered wrong, and insisting on a change of heart on the part of Hindus. All ideas of high and low, he insisted, had to go. The untouchables he renamed Harijans, "men of God", and he even cleaned latrines and made his followers do so, to demonstrate that no work should be looked upon as impure. He opposed child marriage, urged education for girls, asked women to come out from their seclusion and take their proper part in social and national activities. (They came by the thousand!) He worked ceaselessly for the revival of the stagnant villages of India and the dying handicrafts. As an immediate means of relieving the appalling poverty, he engineered the boycott of foreign cloth and popularized the general use of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, thus saving huge sums from going out of the country and restoring employment to idle spinners and weavers, besides adding a subsidiary means of livelihood for the village family. Finally, by his example, he made the ideal of a life of service for others a living reality, for he identified himself with the poor and the downtrodden.

He himself, as every one knows, wore the scantiest of clothing, travelled third class, repeatedly took long, exhausting walks, for months at a time, through the villages in different parts of the country, lived on a few annas a day, made a mud-walled, thatched hut his only home. And when, on January 30, 1948, less than six months after India became free, he fell a victim to the assassin's bullet, all his worldly possessions could be gathered up into one small bundle. Such was the Father of the Nation.

Although Gandhiji was the outstanding figure in the national freedom movement, innumerable other valiant workers, both before and after him, contributed their share

to the fulfilment of the long struggle. From every part of the country, from every religious group, from every social level, selfless workers sprang up. It is fitting to recall the names of giants who are no longer here. Some, in the earlier days, fought in principle along constitutional lines, like Dadabhai Naoroji, G. K. Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Tej Bahadur Sapru. Some threw their energies into social, religious, educational and literary activities of national significance, like Pheroze Shah Mehta, the Ranades, Dayananda Saraswati, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (whose "Bande Mataram" is one of India's national songs), Rabindranath Tagore, Bharati and Prem Chand. Others, before the dominant emergence of Gandhiji, joined or supported the early revolutionary party and lived dangerously, ready to throw down their lives at a moment's notice, like Bipin Chandra Pal, the young Sri Aurobindo and his brother Barin Ghose, and Bhagat Singh, or their later successors of the Extremist wing of the Congress Party, C. R. Das and Netaji Subhas Bose.

The greater number of leaders, however, threw themselves whole-heartedly into Gandhiji's movement, gave up lucrative careers, and repeatedly went to jail, sometimes for years at a stretch. Those who have now joined the immortals are stalwarts like Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai and Vallabhbhai Patel, Lala Lajpat Rai, Dr Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Jamnalal Bajaj, Sarojini Naidu, Syama Prasad Mookerjee. As for the rest, the greater part are the present rulers (and servants) of free India. They are Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, President Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, C. Rajagopalachari, Govind Ballabh Pant, K. N. Katju, R. A. Kidwai, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Amrit Kaur, and some others who have left the Congress to become leaders of opposition parties, but who still hold on to the ideal of service to the country, like Acharya Kripalani, Acharya Narendra Deo and Jai Prakash Narain, or, in another category all his own, Vinoba Bhave, busy with his collection of free land gifts from free India, on behalf of the landless poor. There are also count-

less workers as anonymous as those authors, painters and sculptors who were the makers of ancient Indian culture, who have left no name behind them, asked for no personal recognition and received none.

Fortunately, India can now look back on a long history of experimentation and practical application in life of a wide variety of ideas. An intense interest in ideas and a willingness to see them pursued to their logical conclusion has, indeed, always characterized the Indian outlook. Modifications, required by the changed political status and objectives of free India, in old mental attitudes and habits should cause no serious difficulty, provided, of course, that the fundamentals of Indian culture are not violated. Real values have to be distinguished from the froth of novelty for novelty's sake, and from dead rituals, customs and vested interests which have now outgrown their usefulness. In other words, political freedom has to be consolidated through the intelligent and enthusiastic co-operation of the people in carrying out necessary reforms and in working for the fulfilment of the manifold schemes of development.

What are the outstanding objectives before the country today? They can be summed up as maintaining political freedom, ensuring to the Indian people opportunities for a better and fuller life, spiritually, intellectually, physically and materially, and contributing to international peace and goodwill. All the major problems of new India can be grouped under one or another of these heads.

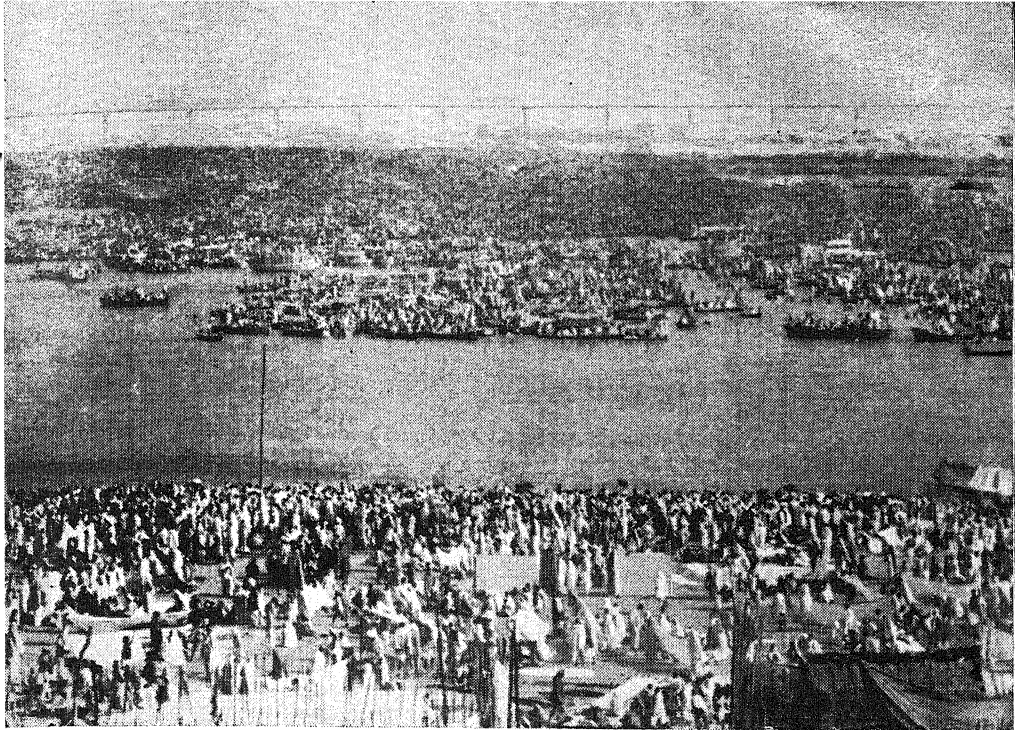
The first question, maintenance of political freedom, depends on external policy, effective defence and internal security. A good deal is heard about India's foreign policy these days. Put very simply, it is an independent policy of non-alignment with either of the two great antagonistic power blocs which have tended to tear the world asunder since the last war. This policy is in line with India's best traditions in the past. As long as India was mistress of her own destiny, she rarely indulged in aggression, but cultivated friendly relations with all countries. India is, therefore,



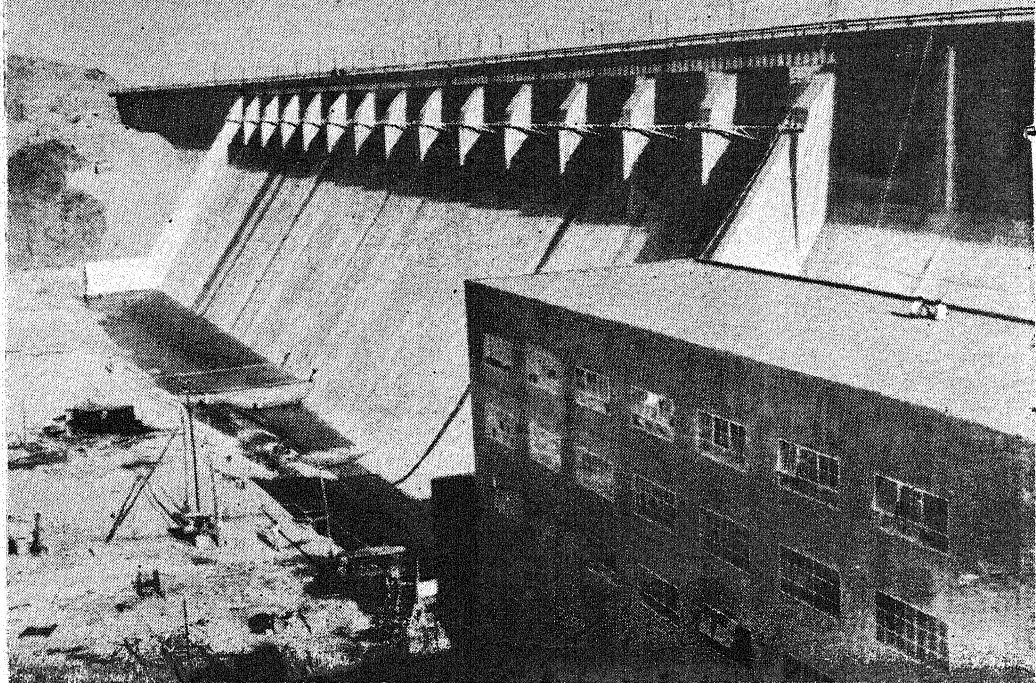
*Portrait of the Emperor Akbar
Late Mughal period*



Radha and Krishna
A painting of the Kangra School (18th century A.D.)



Kumbh Mela at Allahabad, 1954



*Dam and power-house at Tilaiya,
Damodar Valley, Bihar*

opposed to being dragged into another possible world war of general destruction, especially when she feels that she has no personal quarrel with either of the two sides. But in adopting a policy of non-alignment, India reserves the right to judge each international issue on its own merits and act accordingly, if action is called for.

Relations with Pakistan have remained strained since Partition, but India has not given up hope of an entirely peaceful settlement of the outstanding disputes with Pakistan, including the vexed question of Kashmir. India's proposal of a no-war pact as a preliminary means of easing tensions was unfortunately refused. If India unilaterally rules out force, only persuasion and negotiation remain as methods for settling the disputes, but such methods inevitably take time, patience, restraint and a spirit of compromise. Threats, bluster and the shouting of slogans do not help. Efforts are likewise being made to obtain the elimination of foreign pockets on Indian soil, no longer consistent with the status of independence, and a source of danger to Indian stability. Further, India has expressed unqualified opposition to the continuance of colonialism and racial discrimination anywhere in Asia and Africa, and deeply resents the virulent renewal of discriminatory treatment meted out to both Indians and Africans in the South African Union.

Should peaceful policies fail, and should India at some future date be, unwillingly, dragged into war and subjected to attack from outside, Indian defence forces will be prepared to defend the country to the utmost. Without entering into an arms race with any other nation, considerable progress has been made in military self-sufficiency. Those responsible for the safety of the country have also been able to create, for the first time in Indian history, a truly national defence force on an all-India basis. The old artificial "military" and "non-military" categories have been done away with. Every Indian physically fit and possessing the required mental standards and aptitudes is eligible to join any branch of the services today.

In the new set-up, the idea of service to the people

receives prominent emphasis. Indian troops in Kashmir voluntarily shared their rations with refugees. In Assam, the air force undertook the hazardous task of dropping supplies to stricken villages during the disastrous earthquake and floods of 1950. In Madras, the army rushed lorries to fetch water for drought-stricken villages, and soldiers participated in digging and deepening wells during the water shortage a year or two ago. The voluntary National Cadet Corps and the Territorial Army, with their recently formed auxiliary branches, are providing elementary military training for thousands of young men and hundreds of girls, infusing into them a new spirit of discipline and service. Training includes participation in annual Social Service Camps, and members have a record of fine work connected with the Community Projects, road-building, cleaning of drains, repairing of dams and many similar acts of voluntary service for the people.

This is a new conception of military service. Conventional ideals of loyalty to the country, honour, military discipline and courage on the battle-field still stand as indispensable, but service to the Motherland in every way has now been accepted as a part of military training. India is very proud of her regular armed forces, her new National Cadet Corps and her Territorial Army.

The question of internal stability, however, still gives some cause for anxiety because of newly-awakened local and group loyalties. These are growing at the expense of a truly national outlook, and the inevitable struggle for political power has begun to come to the fore. Six years ago, the great work of peacefully bringing hundreds of semi-autocratic States into the scheme of a unified democratic administration was almost miraculously achieved. At some time, India might well have foundered on the rock of administrative chaos, but thanks to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, first Home Minister in the new regime, the political integrity of the country was assured. Since then, a new potential danger has arisen in the demand for a reorganization of States on the basis of regional language, religion,

or majority group. The States Reorganization Commission is examining the whole problem. Haphazard boundaries may well require some adjustment, but language and communal considerations will have to be weighed against considerations of defence, finance and other practical problems of administration, before the map of India can be redrawn.

An all important question is, will separatist tendencies increase with the possible formation of new States or zonal areas? India has already had experience of the ultimate effect of such separatist tendencies put forward in the 'two-nation theory'. What is the guarantee that a similar demand for complete separation might not follow the creation of Linguistic States? Certainly, no more defections of Indian territory can be tolerated, and no national government worthy of the name could be expected to sign its own execution warrant. The impartial recommendations of the States' Reorganization Commission must be the final basis of decision in the matter of formation of new States. Unity among all sections of the people and all parts of the country is absolutely essential today. Only thus can India hope to survive. It is the first duty of every citizen to think of the welfare of the country as a whole and do nothing to weaken national solidarity.

As a means of cementing Indian unity, a common language has now to be gradually evolved where it does not at present exist. For common communication in the past, four languages, each with its own separate script, have historically served as official languages. They were the monumental Prakrit of Asoka's time; Sanskrit, India's great religious and literary language for more than a thousand years; Persian, declared the court language under Akbar; and English, substituted for Persian in 1836. Now Hindi, India's fifth official language, is to take the place of English for all inter-State communication.

Many would like to see Sanskrit come back as the all-India language. Others would prefer to retain English because of its position as a useful world language today. It

is hoped that both will remain in India as specialized subjects of study. But the fact has to be faced that Sanskrit is not only a very difficult language, but is no longer a spoken language in the India of today. It was replaced by the dozen regional languages of modern India as much as eight centuries ago. To attempt to reverse a fundamental trend is like trying to swim against the current. English, on the other hand, is a foreign language, and it is not in keeping with India's position as a free and independent country to continue to impose English on the country as the national language. The only alternative is Hindi, in the Devanagari script. Hindi is more or less well understood by about 250 millions, out of a total population of 360 millions. In deciding upon Hindi, no petty considerations of favouritism influenced those who had to make the choice, and there should be no feeling of jealousy against Hindi in any part of the country.

Primary education is henceforth to be given in the regional language or mother-tongue, but Hindi is everywhere to be made compulsory in the secondary stage of education. Many countries of the world are bilingual, as a force of circumstance, and the mastery of Hindi in India will become feasible for the school-going population within a generation. At the same time, a healthy development of all the regional languages, from a literary point of view, is to be encouraged, with translation of important works from one language into another.

The constructive programme for social and economic advance, made obligatory under the Directive Principles embodied in the Indian Constitution, forms the positive side of the plan for transforming India into a genuine Welfare State. The purpose is to raise the standard of living of the millions, woefully forgotten and long sunk in poverty and ignorance, so that ultimately they, too, may make their own vital contributions to New India. Many measures to this end have already been taken, while others are the process of being implemented, or form part of India's first Five Year Plan, now in its third year, and well on the way to target

fulfilment. No aspect of India's national life will remain untouched by the vast programme of all-round development, which aims to combine what is best in old Indian traditions and values with economic techniques and with the responsibility for social welfare which is inseparable from the concept of a modern State. Here is the real Indian revolution, then, supplementing and fulfilling the non-violent political revolution by which freedom was won seven years ago.

It is impossible to give more than the barest outline of some of the tremendous changes now being effected in the country. Among legal measures, provision for the removal of untouchability certainly comes first. Not content with the Constitutional declaration against practices which in the past have tolerated or perpetuated social injustice towards the depressed classes, recent enactment has made any such practice punishable by law. To another great section of of population, Hindu women, justice is also sought to be rendered through a liberal revision and unification of divergent laws arbitrarily applicable by custom in different parts of the country or to particular communities, with reference to marriage, divorce and inheritance. Monogamy for Hindus has already come into force in certain States, pending the passing of a comprehensive all-India bill, now receiving its final touches. A third great reform measure of the utmost importance is the transformation of the land laws. In many States, the intermediaries between the State and the cultivators have now been abolished, with guaranteed compensation, and those who actually do the tilling have been permitted to acquire the land. The size of holdings has also generally been restricted, though every effort is being made to prevent uneconomic fragmentation in future.

In the first Five Year Plan, agriculture, as the mainstay of two-thirds of the people, has been given the highest priority. Out of the total proposed outlay of Rs. 2,244 crore (or Rs. 22,440 million), including 175 crores recently added to speed up the provision of work for the educated

unemployed, between a sixth and a seventh has been allotted for the improvement of the agricultural economy, for schemes to produce more food and raw materials, and for the transformation not only of the village environment but of the general rural outlook. Fifty-five Community Projects, each covering 300 villages with a population of roughly 200,000, are already bringing new life to the stagnant countryside, in selected areas in various States; and a large number of additional blocks for development have been handed over to the National Extension Service. At the end of the first five years, it is expected that one fourth of the Indian villages will have been brought under this new development programme.

To rescue the farmer from the vagaries of the monsoon, several huge multi-purpose river valley projects have been undertaken, and others are to be included in the next plan or in subsequent plans. By the end of the first five years, these larger projects will be able to irrigate an additional 8.5 million acres, and at the same time provide a further 1.08 million kilowatts of electric power for lighting towns and villages, rural industrialization and the growing needs of heavy industry. A very large programme of tube-well construction is also being carried out in areas where subsoil conditions are favourable.

Communications are naturally closely related to industrial development and marketing, and these have by no means been neglected in the Plan. To improve communications, some Rs. 4,970 million have been allocated. The Chittaranjan Locomotive Works is already producing locomotives for Indian railways, and of 31 ships, with a gross tonnage of 107,000, acquired for Indian shipping companies during the years 1951-53, six have been built at the Vizagapatam Shipbuilding Yard. The development of new major ports and the expansion of old ones, overhauling of the railway system and building of new key lines, and a great programme of road construction have made considerable progress. Important new national highways with trunk and feeder roads are under construction, and out of 40 new

bridges called for in the Plan, 17 have so far been completed. During the years 1951-53, improvements were effected to 7,200 miles of highways, and district and village roads.

On the side of health and education, where immense leeway has to be made up, a sum of Rs. 1,517 million has been allotted in the Five Year Plan to improve educational facilities, and Rs. 1,000 million for extending medical and health services, including the establishment of a national malarial control programme, training of medical health personnel and establishment of many new hospitals and rural dispensaries. The target in education calls for the achievement, within the period of the Plan, of school facilities for at least 60 per cent of the children in the age group of 6 to 11, secondary education for at least another 15 per cent, and social education for 20 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women in the age group of 14 to 40. Increasing emphasis on practical agriculture and technical training is being introduced in the schools. Science has also been assigned its proper place in the scheme of national affairs. Eleven national laboratories have already been established, and three more are soon to be set up, in order to speed up progress and ensure that India will not lag behind in advanced fundamental research.

Though critics sometimes assert that the pace is too slow, India prefers to adopt a realistic attitude and plan according to her means. Other Five Year Plans will follow the first one, and the second is already being drawn up in advance. The people have shown considerable enthusiasm in doing their part and, as the benefits to all become increasingly apparent, the whole programme may well gain in momentum. In this unique period of Indian history, it is the privilege of every son and daughter of India to contribute whatever lies within his or her power to help in the democratic movement of national reconstruction, and India's millions will not be found wanting.

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